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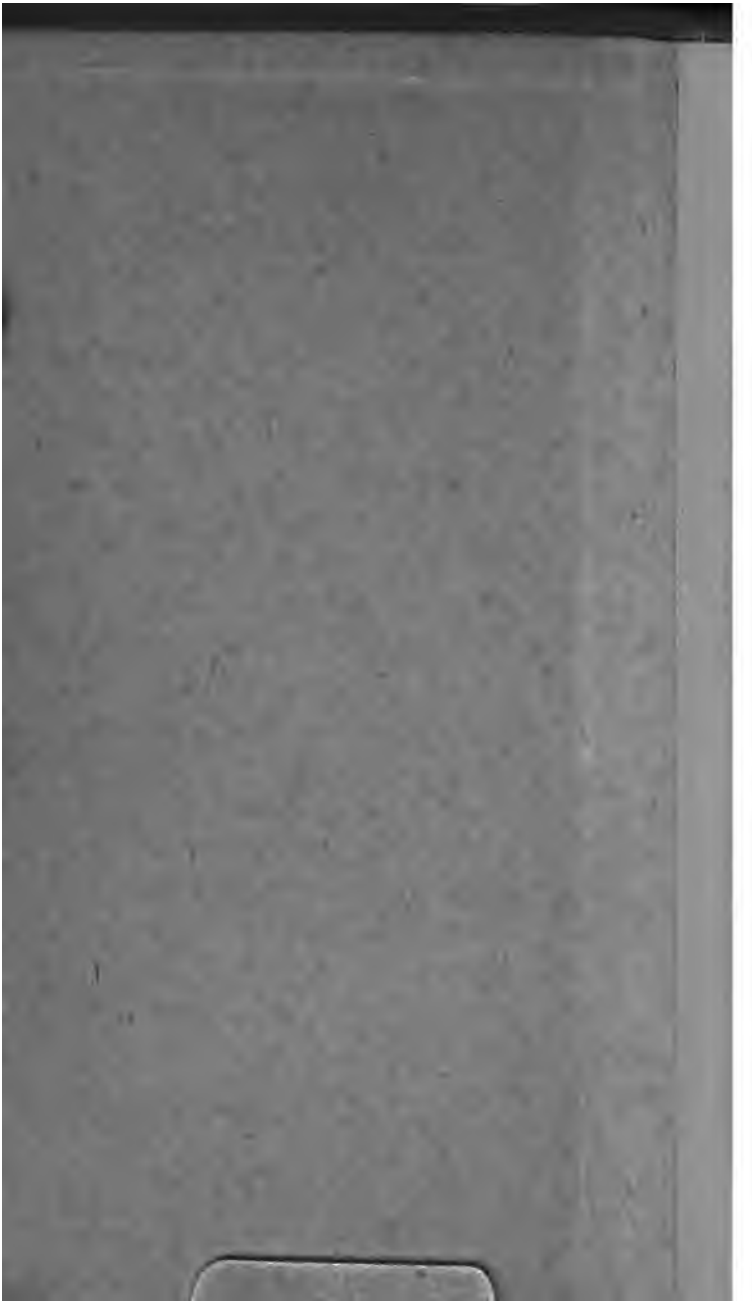

A wild four-footed creature dropped spitting into his lap

WHEN TO LOCK THE STABLE

by

HOMER [illegible]

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MONTY [illegible]

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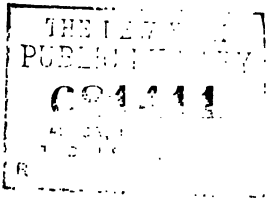

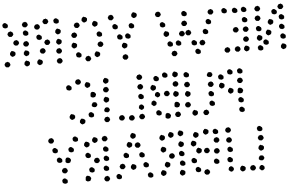

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BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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CHAPTER I

CLEM OF CURRYVILLE

CLEM POINTER walked to the rear of the fire department building, reached behind the lid of a tomato can nailed to the side of the shed, poked out the key and danced it proudly in his hand. The fire department was directly in the rear of the White Front Hardware Store, canned goods a specialty, with a full line of stationery and also a few choice sugar-cured hams for sale.

Clem inserted the key, and the lock sprang open in his hand like something alive. He laid off his coat and looked around admiringly, then taking a piece of flannel he wiped a splotch off the hand-pump made by the rain

where it had leaked through the roof. He hummed at his work, trailing off unexpectedly now and then into an aimless but happy whistle, tightening a perfectly secure bolt, or polishing with his palm the shining brass top of the pump. The sun, slipping down behind the White Front, cut in over his hair, just beginning to turn gray, threw into relief his short square face and filled with light the pleasant lines that ran into the corners of his eyes.

A silhouette projected itself on the wall. "Why, hello, Mr. Kiggins!" Clem Pointer greeted the proprietor of the White Front. "How's the rheum'tism this evening?"

There was always something the matter with Mr. Kiggins. He had lived in Curryville for twenty years and no one could remember when he wasn't sick or growing worse. Mr. Kiggins also had a great command of words and an ability for describing his symptoms that was amazing. You could not talk to him five minutes without believing that the poor man would never live through

the night, but somehow he always managed to get down to the White Front on time and thriftily, year after year, enlarge his stock of canned goods and his full line of stationery.

"I'm the last person in the world to talk about my complaints," he began, "but I come mighty near passing over Jordan last night. It was the rheum'tism coming back in that shoulder I wrenched eleven years ago this summer. It come creepin' on me steady-like, just as if it was weather rheumatics, then it got to stabbing me through the shoulder and side like as if you took a rough rat-tail file and jabbed it back and forth. Every time a stab come I would jump till the whole bed was shaking so I could hardly stick on it. Finally I had to get hold of the headboard or I believe to Jerusalem it would 'a' pitched me clean off on the floor. With one hand steadyin' the head of the bed I got up and begun walking up and down the room singin' *When We Meet at the River* to get my mind off my shoulder when *zunk!* Seven thousand rat-tail files began jabbing me and pulling the flesh

out in little strings. I give just one yell. That was all that was needed. I ain't much of a yeller as a general rule but when I really got something to yell about I can do a pretty good job of it. I never had more spirit for yelling than I had that night and I put it all into one blast. My folks come tumblin' out as if there was something after them—Gerillda carryin' a lamp—but by that time I was cool and collected and says, 'Go back to bed—it's all over. I come pretty near goin' that time but my life has been spared and we'll all go to church to-morrow morning.'

"That won't happen again, though, for I got something that is curin' me up good and fast. You know how near I have been to the river in the last twenty years, but I ain't afraid of it any more. It's Doctor Fordyce!"

"That old fake down at the New Palace Hotel!"

"Doctor Fordyce ain't a fake," returned Mr. Kiggins quickly, weaving nervous fingers through his ragged beard. "He's from Kansas City and's just puttin' up here because he

likes the people. We ought to be mighty glad such a famous specialist would consent to come to this town. He showed me what the newspapers said and they was all his friends.

"I went in just to see what he would say, as I like to ketch 'em up, and he give just one look at me and says before I'd set down: 'You're sufferin' from contusion of the pneumogastric nerve. You're a sick man.' No other doctor'd ever told me tha—"

"The last pill pounder said it was arthritis deformans," broke in Clem, "and you paid him ten dollars for two bottles of pills and inside of a week you had a relapse."

Mr. Kiggins knotted his beard over one finger nervously. "But he couldn't tell what was the matter with me just by lookin' at me the way Doctor Fordyce did. People are driving in in wagons for miles and miles to see him. His office is full of crutches of people that have been cured in other cities, and he says he wishes he didn't have to charge anything for the medicine and that he believes his mis-

sion in this world is to relieve pain and suffering. He says the demand for Doctor Fordyce's Herb Specific is world wide and growin' every day. I seen with my own eyes a letter from Germany ordering twelve dozen bottles."

"Was it written in German?"

"Yes, but he pointed out where it said '12 doz.' and showed me the postmark. He says he likes Curryville so well that he would like to build a fine house and live here, and maybe if he finds the right location he will build a factory for manufacturing Doctor Fordyce's Herb Specific that would give employment to hundreds of people. He says he would like the Bellows Bottom to build a factory on—if he can get enough land. Are you willing to sell your lots, Clem?"

Clem scratched a rough spot on the brass nozzle with a thick thumb nail. "I been holdin' them lots for some little time for a raise, on account of their location, but nothing ever seems to come of it. Still, I don't like that man. He's got a shifty eye—and a shifty eye hain't good in horse or human—and I heard

him make a remark about one of our girls the other day, as she was passing along the street, that I didn't like. My policy is, get acquainted; you can't tell how new sorghum's goin' to taste till it's settled."

Mr. Kiggins turned to the door. "Well, Clem, I must be goin'. If you ever need any fixings for the fire house don't forget the White Front, big values and low prices."

Clem was dreaming of castles far over the horizon of things, a million miles from Curryville; dreams that Mr. Kiggins, looking into Clem's plain face, would never have guessed and would never have understood. There was no one in all Curryville to whom he could tell his dreams, no one who wouldn't laugh or advise him to take Doctor Fordyce's Herb Specific. When you have no one you can share your dreams with the bitterness of the world bites to the heart.

Another silhouette blackened the square of light on the floor: the shadow showed the figure of a boy; only the shadow could never

show the turned-up nose, the thousand freckles and the hair that forked like a current at the ears, a wide tributary flowing in front, and pale clay-colored eddies swirling behind.

"Why, hello, Rencie. Ain't she some wagon now? I've tightened up the pumps so I think they'll throw better. Takes an eternal lot of watching to keep 'em up to the scratch."

"You know what Doctor Fordyce wanted me to do?" Rencie bluntly broke in with a fine disregard for the subject. "Wanted me to play hypnotized and let him do fancy stunts. When he begun telling me I had remarkable eyes and a fine mind I smelled a rat. It makes me mad for anybody to put their hand on my shoulder and call me 'sonny.' They always got something to sell. He don't know I'm going to be a detective."

Clem nodded slowly and thoughtfully, but whether it was in confirmation of Rencie's ideas about Doctor Fordyce or approval over the last sentence it was hard to tell. "So you're going to be a detective," said Clem at last.

"Yes, I've decided sure. I've got a lot of

books I'm practising up now and studying during spare hours. Every time I see a detective's name in the paper I cut it out and save it, and I have the pictures of lots of crooks. My favorite's Kansas Jimmy. I read in a book about how a detective traced a man to a house and found where he had torn a letter all to pieces and throwed it in the fireplace, so he pieced it together and caught the robber slick as a whistle. Pa threw one away the other day. When I got it pieced together—had to wet the kitchen table to make the pieces stick—it was about some company wanting to give a handsome clock with a dollar's worth of soap. Good practise, though; you can never tell when a fellow's going to need it."

"That's right," agreed Clem. "Our best detectives begun early. I guess they get good pay, too."

"As much as the president, I guess. Do you know how detectives shoot, Mr. Pointer?"

Clem plowed a stubby finger into his straw hair in reflection.

"Can't say's I do, Rencie."

"Coming down!"

Clem's eyes opened in a wonderment that Rencie thoroughly enjoyed, and to a request for elucidation Rencie took plenty of time, for that was a secret of the craft that very few knew.

"Shoot that knot-hole!"

Clem brought down his forefinger at the gap in the wall and fired a couple of shots with his crooked thumb.

"There, you brought it down from above the firing-line. Quick as you got it on a direct line you fired. If you bring it up from underneath you don't get such a good bead on it. All the best detectives shoot that way. I read it in a revolver advertisement. Do you know how to take a pistol away from a robber when he holds you up? Suppose he draws a gun on you like that—what'd you do then?"

Clem's face drew into wrinkled thought for a moment, while Rencie stood keyed to a high pitch of excitement.

"Why, I dunno; I guess I'd grab his hand," Clem hesitated. "Or maybe I'd trip him."

"No," said Rencie with a touch of scorn and at the same time with the assurance of one thoroughly versed in his subject. "Here, you be the robber. Take this gun," picking up the sawed end of a broom handle that chocked the wheel of the fire cart, "and as I come in the door flash it on me."

Rencie stepped out the door and Clem, weapon in hand, waited inside for the luckless passer-by. In a moment Rencie's freckled and flushed face loomed in the doorway.

"Halt! hands up!" called Clem, carefully bringing down the revolver from above the firing-line.

Rencie advanced a quick step, threw up his hand and knocked Clem's right arm high. The revolver rattled to the floor. Catching the extended arm, Rencie turned Clem on a pivot and with a half-hitch of his arm over his own shoulder had the villain crying for mercy.

"Oh, oh!" cried the highwayman, "I give up. It's breaking my arm. This robber business hasn't any attractions for me."

Rencie released him and Clem leaned against

the wheel of the fire cart in more than pretended weakness. "A detective's got to know everything that way," said the young sleuth proudly. "I could break your arm like a pipe-stem. Now supposing you were a robber and came slipping up behind me."

"No, sir, I'm going to stick to the fireman business. Feels like you'd pulled a string out of the back part of my arm that I never knowed was there before."

Rencie came over, sat down on the tool-box and fell into deep thought, the heel of his hand buried in his cheek. "I'm goin' to specialize in bank robbers," said Rencie, slowly and thoughtfully. "They're the hardest to catch, and more money in it, too."

Clem nodded in sympathy. "My ambition ain't along that line," said Clem at last, baring more of his heart than he would to any other person in all Curryville, for often a boy can understand when an older person would only laugh. He spoke hesitatingly, not as if choosing the right word, but as if such a thing could not be hurried. "I have always wanted

to do something big, be somebody. Keep a train from being wrecked; save somebody from drowning—something so they'd say I was a hero. All my life I've wanted to but I've had to drag along in just the same old rut. No chance here and I know there ain't, but I get a lot of satisfaction day-dreaming about it. I guess that's the reason I keep up this fire department. If I'd tell anybody else in Curryville but you they'd laugh. You can't ever be anything when people have knowed you ever since you had stone bruises. . . But sometime, somehow, I'm going to be a hero. Go ahead, Rencie, and be a detective and if I can ever help you in any way I'll sure do it."

Rencie nodded slowly and understandingly. Strange companions were these two; trusting each other with their secrets and, what is even more of a test of the communion of two souls, sharing their dreams.

Rencie lifted his head and on his cheek was the imprint of his hand. He rose slowly to his feet, and nodding a good night to Clem, was gone.

Clem had locked the door and was turning away when he hesitated and drew back. Strolling by was a girl with the sweetest of faces, but at the same time a shadow of sadness somewhere on her features; it was difficult to tell whether it grew in her eyes, hung in the corners of her mouth or was in her weighted step. She bowed and up went Clem's hand and off came his hat, clumsily, but with great respect. He had met her several times, but she had seemed so far above him that he had been rather abashed. She had been in Curryville only a few months and had kept to herself much of the time; so much, indeed, that a mystery had grown up around her. From whence she had come no one knew; and less why.

"This is the first time I have seen our fire house," said Miss Mary Mendenhall sweetly.

"Would you like to go through it?"

She did not smile at the idea of "going through it," though there was only one room and everything could be seen from the door.

"Yes."

After Clem had explained all the mysteries of the place, talking with the eager interest of a boy, they started down the street toward the house she had rented and which she was keeping up with the aid of a servant. To have a servant in Curryville was enough to make anybody talked about, let alone not knowing anything about the person's past history. Before he knew it Clem was talking about himself, telling her intimate things, as we often do to comparative strangers; about his hope of being a hero some day, somehow. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to be confiding in her. Suddenly he caught himself:

"This ain't interesting to you. I never told anybody else half that much. Tell me about yourself."

Miss Mary Mendenhall shook her head. "There isn't anything to tell. I am alone—and trying to be happy. You know what hard work it is trying to be happy by yourself."

"Why ain't you happy, Miss Mary?" asked

Clem, coming a trifle nearer her edge of the walk.

She drew away the slightest little bit. "I don't know," she sighed. "Yes, I do know," she said, correcting herself after her kind. "I wish I could tell you—I wonder if I can tell you." She looked at him eagerly, studying his honest blue eyes with the fine wrinkles radiating from the corners. The muscles in her lips took life and she was on the point of speaking when the figure of a man loomed ahead of them. At sight of him her lips drew into two hard lines and she turned her head aside without speaking.

The man was tall, with the calm conquering air of a traveling salesman. Removing his hat, he bowed sweepingly and beamed elaborately. Had he not had such perfect control of himself the beam would have been a smirk. The man was Doctor Fordyce.

"It's a pleasure to meet two people who look so happy on such a hot evening." Innocently said, it contained something that made the girl

give him a quick look and bring down her lips tight against her teeth.

"I have been hoping I might meet you again, Miss Mendenhall," continued Doctor Fordyce.

The girl's lips moved as if to say something, but the words did not formulate themselves.

"If you will pardon me I'll hasten on," said Miss Mendenhall, and started down the walk. Doctor Fordyce moved to join her, but Clem stepped in in advance and walked with her to her door. When he came back he found Doctor Fordyce waiting for him. The doctor was evidently trying to ingratiate himself into Clem's favor.

"Good evening again, Mr. Pointer. Do you know, Mr. Pointer, I like your town so well that I may settle down here and become a taxpaying citizen like yourself? The more I see of Curryville the more I am impressed with it—and its citizens."

Tall, sleek and watchful, there was about him a forced air of gaiety. He waited a moment to see what effect his words had on

his hearer. He wore a frock coat and in its tail he carried a silk handkerchief. That alone prejudiced Clem against him; no possible good could come from a man who wore a coat to his knees and carried his handkerchief in its tail. When he talked he crossed his arms over his chest and tilted back and forth on his heels, swinging so far from the perpendicular that one trembled for his safety and had an almost irresistible impulse to catch him by the shoulders and straighten him up again.

"Yes, it's a right smart town," agreed Clem with true mid-western civic pride. The quickest way to the heart of a man west of the Mississippi River is to say a good word for his town. The people may quarrel among themselves, but when a stranger comes within their gates they are shoulder to shoulder, swearing their own city is the rose-bed of the national flower garden. Doctor Fordyce was civic wise.

"By the way, Mr. Pointer, would you like to have a monkey? I have one I've been experimenting with in my research work and you

may have it. It's a cute little thing. Come on it and see it." By this time they had reached the New Palace Hotel, where the doctor lived.

When he swung open the door to his room a little marmoset ran behind the curtains, bearing its tail aloft in an outraged half-circle. When Doctor Fordyce reached for it the queer little thing brushed its face quickly as if clearing its eyes, ran up the curtain and swung on the pole. No sooner had Doctor Fordyce mounted a chair than it leaped to his shoulder and ran down his back; he turned and finally captured it in a corner.

In a few minutes it was quite content in Clem's arms. Clem took off his gold spectacles and laid them aside so that the marmoset would not seize them. Clem did not need glasses, but his sister, Hulda, with whom he lived, thought that he ought to wear them, so he meekly gave in.

As Clem stroked the monkey's side and pulled its fingers, his sunburned face lighted with a fine smile. Honesty and an almost

childish simplicity showed in every line of it. "Ain't you a cute thing?" he crooned, giving it a poke. "Land o' jumpin', but you got tail to burn. Say, what makes you scratch so—is it fleas or just pastime?"

Doctor Fordyce half sat in the window studying Clem. His eyes winked fast and he cleared his throat—he was preparing a question. "Oh, by the way, Mr. Pointer, have you known Miss Mendenhall long?"

"She has not lived here long," returned Clem simply. "Why?"

"I just wondered—that was all." He lowered his voice. "Has she ever said anything about herself—where she came from and those things—you understand?"

His face was expressionless, even though smiling. Doctor Fordyce chose his words carefully. He was too skilled in psychology to say too much.

"No," answered Clem. "Not a word."

With the marmoset buttoned under his coat, Clem went hurrying down the street, cut a corner and came into his own back yard. The

kitchen porch was as methodically and carefully arranged as an office: the washing-machine with its wringer, the screws carefully loosened so that the rubber cylinders would not meet and flatten during the six idle days, was backed carefully into the corner; a broom stood on its handle that the straws might not flatten and on a nail in the wall, carefully protected from the weather-boarding by pale oilcloth so that the drippings would not show, hung a shining dishpan. Not a spot or a speck could give evidence against the mistress of this house.

Clem tugged at the white button on the screen door. Here and there a damp spot still splotched the freshly mopped kitchen floor and the odor of stove blacking still hung heavy on the air.

"Hulda, Hulda," called Clem, "see what I've got!"

"Be careful of your feet," came a muffled voice from the pantry. "Don't track everything up. I might know you'd be gettin' back just as I got all the work finished."

Clem paused in the doorway; on her knees,

her outer skirt folded up and caught around her hips, a cake of scouring soap in one hand and a brush in the other, Hulda was making a mirror of the pantry floor.

With Hulda cleanliness was more than next to godliness, for who could hope to be godly without first being cleanly? A spot on the table-cloth made her lose her appetite and a speck on her Sunday alpaca made her positively ill. Her proud boast was that she was always prepared for company; it made no difference how unexpectedly they came she never had to scurry over the house shutting doors, tossing shoes into corners and pushing things under the bed.

"I got a surprise for you, Hulda," keeping his coat pulled over the marmoset.

"No, you ain't—you're just as late as ever. There ain't a woman in Curryville that keeps her house in half as good order as I do—you can't put your fingers on top of a single door in this house and find dust—and you ain't here a minute more than you have to be to enjoy it. Just this day Mrs. Kiggins said to me,

Company! A monkey company to me!

'Miss Pointer, you are the best housekeeper I ever see in my life,' and what do I get for it? Nothing. Three meals a day and having to do the dishes myself. Shut that screen before the house's full of flies. Stand on the edge of that zinc till the floor dries. Now, what you got?"

"A—a monkey, Hulda," said Clem meekly.

"A monkey!" exclaimed Hulda, coming to her feet with an audible snap in her knees, and bracing a hand on each hip. "A monkey!"

"Yes, Hulda. I thought it would be company for you while I had to be down-town."

"Company! A monkey company to me! It takes two monkeys to be company and, Clem Pointer, I ain't a monkey. I hate 'em. I hate the sight of 'em."

Clem mounted it on his arm; the little thing wiped its face and turned its head to one side as if cleverly calculating, if it made a dash, how far its freedom might extend. Then suddenly it reached behind its ear and scratched.

"Take it out, take the thing out," wailed Hulda. "They'll drop on the floor."

Clem backed away.

"Don't get into that fly-paper, and be careful of that lamp chimney. Don't drop any of —of them."

"That ain't what you think it is," pleaded Clem. "That's just a habit. I looked it over carefully and it ain't got anything. It would be so amusing to have around on rainy days."

Hulda's arm shot out into a commanding line, the finger straight at the door.

Clem edged through it slowly. Hulda put the back of her hand up to her mouth in hesitation, started to raise her voice, then checked herself.

Slowly an ellipsis of Clem's face cut into the rectangle of the door, growing until it was an eclipse, his nose pressed against the screen.

"Well, put it in the wood-shed then," said Hulda more kindly, and turned back to her brush and soap.

"Much talk about the camp-meeting to-day, Clem?" asked Hulda as her brother came back, her voice softer.

"Yes, people are getting interested. It'll be

a big success this year. Can I do anything to help, Hulda?"

"Yes, rub off the checker-board."

Up went Clem's hand to his nose.

"There, that's better! You might help set the table if you want to right bad."

Clem turned to his duties with more willingness than skill and soon the red cover was spread, the dishes glistening on it.

"I guess we'd better fall to," Hulda said, bringing out a plate of potato cakes, crisp and brown. They ate in silence until Hulda reached down at her side where a pitcher of milk was cooling in a pail of water, then resting the pitcher on the edge of the bucket until the last drip had splashed, she poured Clem a second glass, and without lifting her eyes asked:

"What are you going to call it?"

The way she held on to the last word left no room for doubt as to what was meant.

"Garibaldi."

"Why?"

Clem bent over his potato cake for a minute,

then answered more as if thinking aloud than replying to a question:

"He was a great man—and—and a hero."

Clem finished and pushed back in his chair. Hulda interpreted the action.

"Now you just stay home to-night and be company for me. I guess they can play checkers down to the Owl one night without you. I can't understand why you want to leave a spick and span home and hang around an old filthy drug store. Man nature is beyond me!"

Clem turned back and silently helped clear off the dishes. He drew down the window shades, lighted the lamp and opened his paper. After she had dried the dishes Hulda drew her chair to the other side of the round, white marble-topped table, with a yellow crack running through it, and took up her Bible. She turned through it until she came to a book-mark that at first looked like a blur of red and blue yarn but, held right side up, spelled in fancy letters, "Love thy Neighbor," and began puzzling over where she had left off. With one elbow on the table she read the Holy Word, but after a time

the Bible began sinking lower and lower, stopping suddenly and coming abruptly back into place, but each time falling a little below its former mark. Finally it dropped into her lap, struggled once or twice to rise and finally lay there peacefully, her broad thumb in the fold. Across the table, Clem's head turned limply sidewise, the lines in his neck drawn tight, his lips parting to a low rhythmic intake. The paper, slipping farther and farther down his lap, at last worked over his knees and fluttered to the floor.

Suddenly the sharp insistent ringing of a bell broke over them.

Clem leaped to his feet. "It's a fire," he exclaimed.

A runner went clattering by on the sidewalk.

Clem hurried after his hat; Hulda opened the front door and stood in it with the lamp held high, lighting his way. "Don't catch cold, Clem," she warned as he clicked the front gate, "and don't do any heavy liftin'."

After his footsteps had died away she came

back and set the lamp over the yellow crack. Then she got out a pair of her brother's socks. "Like as not he'll come back wet and'll want to change," she said, turning up the lamp and flattening the end of the thread between her teeth.

CHAPTER II

A GREAT SOCIAL EVENT

A FIRE in Curryville was a great social event. Everybody went. You would just as soon think of missing the free parade on circus day, with the clown who was always stumbling over his own feet and falling smack down on his face and coming up and rubbing the wrong spot, as you would of failing to run to a fire. Rich and poor fought the flames together, working side by side: Judge Woodbridge, who wore the only genuine Panama in town, passing the bucket along to Rick Oody, who made away with all the horses after they were too old and crippled to work. Give Rick two dollars and with a spade over one shoulder and the halter rope in his free hand he would lead the shambling old horse down the street, its hips sticking up under its hide like

two bed-posts with a quilt thrown over them. Down past the ice-house he would lead him, then out of sight around Diedrich Bend. An hour or two later he would come whistling back, a line of clay across the bottom of the spade, heading straight toward Joe's Place, the halter swinging empty in his hand.

"Where is the fire, Rencie?" panted Clem, holding the heel of his hand over his heart. Rencie had turned in the alarm.

Everybody turned in expectancy toward Rencie. "I tell you I did some tall running. I bet there ain't another boy in town'd been here yet. I was asleep when ma came running into my room and said there was a fire, but I have myself trained so when I wake up I wake up all over."

"But where is it?" demanded the men in chorus.

"So I jumped into my clothes quicker'n lightning and came tearing down to turn in the alarm."

Rencie was bound to get the most out of his exalted position.

"You can't make the run with us if you don't hurry up."

"I guess I broke some records. I got out in the middle of the street part way."

Clem put his hand on Rencie's shoulder.

"In the old Kemp house," said Rencie with the last nibble at the sweets.

In a moment the fire cart was in the middle of the street and the men were lining up on the tongue and rope. Each fireman had to take hold of the pulling rope with his hands and run as best he could. Clem rang the bell and the Curryville fire department went swinging down Main Street.

The yard was full of people long before the fire wagon arrived. Rick Oody was half-way up a ladder against the side of the house yelling directions at the top of his voice, his trousers hanging to one hip. "Smash in that window," he called frantically. "Get some water; bring me a rope. Save the furniture. Why don't you do something—if you ain't a-goin' to do something let me come down there!"

Judge Woodbridge, in his striped undershirt

with his suspenders pulled over it, his bare feet thrust into his shoes, laces flying loose, was puffing his way through the crowd, commanding everybody to be quiet and not get excited. The judge was the most excited person there, his voice sometimes rising high and breaking. "Now don't get excited. It ain't a windy night; just keep your heads. I've been through the War and seen worse fires than this. Mrs. Kiggins, now don't you begin crying and spluttering around."

Mr. Kiggins was saving things. Pushing open a door he rushed in, a finger of smoke twisting out after him. He was gone a minute, then appeared holding a glass case in one hand; in it were two wax humming-birds, one sitting on a huneysuckle twig and the other hanging in the air, its bill buried in the heart of a flower. In the other hand he carried a bamboo newspaper rack. Mr. Kiggins burst through the crowd, bowling everybody over until he was free, then he dropped the glass case with a crash and painstakingly deposited the paper rack in the shelter of a tree. Rushing back he

came out with a steaming kettle of water and carefully set it out of harm's way.

Finally the firemen came up panting, whirled the cart around and Clem, with the nozzle in his hand, ran out the hose. A board was jerked off the platform around the well and one end of the hose let down into the water. Then the men began to work the pumps. Nobody wanted to man the pumps but there were always plenty to play the stream.

Not until he was almost in the yard did it flash over Clem whose house it was. The old Kemp house was the one Miss Mary Mendenhall had rented for the summer. A fear that he could not name caught his heart. But when word came that Miss Mendenhall with her servant were accounted for he turned to the work before him.

He ran up the ladder with the hose wriggling in his arms, and thrust it through a window.

"Take it cool, Clem, take it cool," urged Judge Woodbridge; "don't try to crawl in that window—you'll be killed sure. I saw worse

fires'n this in the War. If you feel tired handling the hose I'll take it!"

Clem did not hear, or at least pay attention.

Mr. Kiggins came hurrying up.

"You go an' inspect things, Clem," he said, reaching for the brass nose. "I'll take the nozzle."

Clem waved him away. "I couldn't trust it to anybody else. You go and help on the pumps."

Mr. Kiggins fell back, but he didn't go to the pumps. Disappearing through the door he was back in a half-second with one hand full of magazines and in the other a highly polished shell that if you put up to your ear and listened you could hear the sea roaring in. Hurling his salvage to the ground he rushed back to further service.

Rick Oody bobbed up at Clem's side. "How's she workin' to-night, Clem?" asked Rick, greedily eying the nozzle. "I got time to play her a minute."

Suddenly Clara, the maid living in the house,

In *his arms* was a nightrobed figure

burst through the crowd. "Where's Miss Mendenhall?" she cried. "This was my night off and I just got back. Ain't anybody seen her?"

A hurried search was made; nobody had seen her. Clem thrust the hose into Rencie Ford's hands and ran into the house. A hushed expectant silence fell over the crowd. The crackling of the flames on the shingles and the intake of the pump sounded for the first time. A minute dragged by, the smoke silently worming its way out through the broken panes.

Then Clem appeared. In his arms was a night-robed figure. He staggered across the porch but half a dozen hands caught him.

"It's Miss Mendenhall," cried Clara. "Thank the Lord," rubbing out a red patch of fire in the girl's robe with her bare hands. In a moment the girl's head was resting in Clara's lap. Miss Mendenhall opened her eyes and Clara raised her own to heaven, her lips moving silently.

After the first anxiety had subsided, the crowd flowed over to Clem. From lip to lip flew words of praise.

Mrs. Kiggins helped Miss Mendenhall to her feet. The girl looked around dizzily until she found a certain face in the background. "I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart," she said simply. "You have saved my life."

"It ain't anything," stammered Clem, then bit his lip in realization that that wasn't the right thing to say. But he would add something that would fix it up: "I hope you're feeling well."

Miss Mendenhall smiled faintly. "Not just exactly well—but thankful."

"You sure had a close call," put in Mrs. Kiggins. "The other night I had a dream about you—you know, I'm psychic—and I saw all this just as plain as day."

"It makes me shudder to think," said the girl at the first pause, "to think what—what if you hadn't come."

"It was sure lucky. I could have warned

you in advance, being as I seen you so plain, but—well, you come home with me and I'll tell you about it. I wasn't any more'n a girl when I discovered this gift and—"

Mrs. Kiggins shut off from sight the white figure with its flowing hair, and Clem stood looking after until Judge Woodbridge came up and patted him on the shoulder. "I know your knees must be wabbly so I'll help you home."

"I don't think he needs much help," declared a voice at Judge Woodbridge's side. There was an insinuation in it that meant more than the mere words. "It's been my experience that a little smoke doesn't hurt a healthy man." Clem turned quickly; it was Doctor Fordyce.

The judge stiffened as if to give more emphatic answer than speech, then deliberately turned his back on the tall figure of the doctor, and put his hand under Clem's elbow to escort him down the street.

"Don't pay any attention to him," whispered the judge. "You're a hero. Make a bow."

Clem stiffened and nodded his head abrupt-

ly, while a chorus of voices called out words of approval and hope that he would be feeling all right by morning. Hard as Clem tried to look humble he could not help lifting his head and stepping a trifle higher than was needed, especially when he had such a substantial and dignified escort as the corpulent judge.

At the gate Judge Woodbridge paused and dropped his hand on Clem's shoulder. "There's nobody in Curryville I'd rather see this honor come to than you. Come into my office tomorrow, Clem, and make yourself at home."

Clem hurried up the path to his porch. At last his dreams had come true; everything had happened with such a rush that he scarcely realized it all. A square of light opened in the wall; in the middle was framed Hulda's broad figure.

"Hulda, I got something great to tell you," bubbled Clem.

"No, you ain't! Gertie Knabb run in here a minute ago and told me all about it. Seems to me you could find something better to do than to go around carrying undressed women

in your arms, and from what I hear she ain't the best of reputations anyway. You take a hot foot-bath and a mustard plaster and go to bed. I don't want you sniffin' around with a cold the rest of the summer."

Hulda waved Clem toward a candy-bucket steaming full of hot water on the linoleum in the kitchen.

Before making ready for the steaming pail Clem looked into the wood-shed. Garibaldi was gone. Clem called softly but the creature did not answer. In his bare feet on the rough stones Clem called and called, but there was no response. When he turned toward the house Hulda was standing in the window, and an explanation leaped into his mind. He fixed his lips to speak, but the words would not come; he quailed before his sister.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish," she said, and turned back to her reading.

CHAPTER III

QUITE A CATCH

"YOU had a mighty close call last night," said Mrs. Kiggins the next morning, coming into the room that she had given over to Miss Mary Mendenhall. "I saw it all in a dream as plain as I can see my hand. I was walking in a big forest all by myself when I saw a spurt of smoke come out of a place where a limb had been sawed off and purty soon the whole tree was in smoke. Then a squirrel darted away with his tail streaming out behind. Purty soon a cloud carried you down and set you up against a tree. In my psychical dream everything has to be interpreted. The tree was your house, and the squirrel was Rencie Ford running to turn in the alarm and of course the cloud was Clem Pointer."

"Oh, I see," sighed the girl. "Mr. Pointer was very brave, wasn't he?"

"Yes. But I always say 'What's the use of telling people about a thing like that?—it only makes 'em worry.' Now, don't you think so, Miss Mendenhall?"

"I suppose so. Do you think the strain was too much for him?"

"No, he's strong. Some say I ought to tell people as soon as I get a vision, but I don't think so. What's going to be is going to be, and it can't be helped. You ought to be thankful you got off as lucky as you did."

The girl mused a moment. "I wouldn't if it hadn't been for him. Everybody seems to like him."

"Yes. One time I foretold a sick spell that Clem was going to have. I saw him layin' in a pile of feathers—just like it was yesterday—and moaning. Sure enough he got sick and they put him on a feather bed. Do you think I ought to charge for my gift?"

"You might lose it then. Was it anything serious?"

"Typhoid and I knowed what it was two days before the doctor did. We don't have much sickness in Curryville now," said Mrs. Kiggins, laying a deliberate trap. "Oh, by the way, how do you like our city?"

The girl was looking out the window as she brushed her hair. "I find it very pleasant," coming back to herself.

"I don't believe I remember where you said you was raised," casting a sharp eager look at her night's refugee. Miss Mendenhall was a mystery to the people of Curryville, and Mrs. Kiggins would make the best of this opportunity.

"I don't believe I ever said," returned the girl innocently.

This did not stem Mrs. Kiggins' curiosity.

"Oh, I thought it was St. Louis. Funny how a person gets an idea like that," covered up Mrs. Kiggins.

"Isn't it?"

Mrs. Kiggins drew the face of the sterling-backed mirror across her apron. "There's water in the pitcher, Miss Mendenhall. Come down

to breakfast soon's you get slicked up." Mrs. Kiggins turned in the door, one hand on the jam and the other on her hip. Then she fired a random shot to see if it would give her a gossip hold. "How's your work getting along now?"

She knew that her night's guest worked at something over the heads of the people of Curryville, but what it was she didn't know. It had caused her much uneasiness. Her psychic dreams stubbornly refused to come to the aid of her curiosity. She did not know that her night's guest was a writer of books, and had she known, it would have meant little to her.

"Quite satisfactorily."

This wasn't very enlightening.

"Don't it tire you out this warm weather?"

"I can work better in summer than in winter."

"Oh, I see." Mrs. Kiggins didn't, but that covered up as well as anything. "The soap's in the box. Our water's so hard you'll have to use a lot of it."

"Thanks. I shall. Have you any writing-paper?"

After Mrs. Kiggins had gone Mary Mendenhall sat down at the writing-table and thought for a long time. She filled a page, read it and tore it up. She couldn't think how she wanted to say it, so she addressed the envelope and began again. The envelope was addressed to Mr. Clement Pointer. Once more she tried and this time finished the letter. Then she read it over; a letter seemed so cold and unappreciative when she could thank him face to face, and besides it would give her another chance to see him in person. It is in just such little indecisions as this that trouble builds its nest.

"The toast's getting cold." There was a bit of impatience in Mrs. Kiggins' voice.

Mary tore the pages into bits, dropped them into the waste-basket and went down-stairs.

She had scarcely finished her toast when Mrs. Kiggins came bustling into the room full of excitement. "Doctor Fordyce has come to see you. He's quite a ketch and I don't

blame you for settin' your cap for him. They say he's goin' to build a big medicine factory here. We're all mighty glad he come to Curryville."

Mary Mendenhall sank weakly back and colored down her pretty throat. "Please tell the doctor that I can't see him."

Mrs. Kiggins gasped. "I guess you didn't understand—it's Doctor Fordyce—the new doctor."

"Yes, I know. Tell him that it is impossible for me to see him."

Mrs. Kiggins slowly pivoted on her heels, shaking her head, a movement more eloquent than her words would have been. In a moment she was back. "He says that he must see you. He has a grand air about him. I never see a man that could carry himself the way he does and he helps a lady up steps elegantly."

"Tell him that I can not see him."

Mrs. Kiggins looked dumfounded. "All the other girls would be just crazy to have him pay them attention, Miss Mendenhall."

Mary Mendenhall shook her head, and Mrs.

Kiggins slowly withdrew only to return again. "He has an automobile, and he says he just must. He is the gentleman like he might have traveled abroad."

The girl's face clouded. "All right, then, tell him to come in."

In a moment she stepped to the parlor door and Doctor Fordyce arose to meet her. Her face was flushed, the color making it even more attractive. There was a poise and swing about her to gladden any eye.

"I must see you," said Doctor Fordyce under his breath. "We will be alone," waving his hand to the machine outside.

"This is not a very fitting time, just after a fire in which most of my clothes were burned up."

"You can wrap up and with a veil you won't need anything else."

She got into the machine with him and in a few minutes they were outside the boundaries of Curryville. Doctor Fordyce looked straight ahead as if planning a campaign. "I thank my stars every hour that I have found you,"

he began. "I had given up all hope when chance brought me to this town. I have hunted everywhere for you; you have never been out of my mind an hour since we parted. Parted is rather a weak word—since you drove me away. And not content with that you must suddenly disappear. But now I have you and that is all that matters."

The girl faced slowly toward him, drawing back slightly, and looking steadily into his eyes. "I thought you were bringing me out here to tell me something."

"I am—the greatest thing in the world—love." A gallant sentence, but one that did not ring true. It was said with too much sureness, too much ease, too much dexterity.

"Turn around and take me straight back to town."

Doctor Fordyce looked at her in surprise. A hard line ran along his lips and the soft pleading note left his voice. "Not until you promise me to make me happy."

"You know why I want nothing to do with you—why I hate you—why—"

"I am going to teach you to love me." Said with the same note of calmness and sureness. Behind it could be felt a will strong enough to follow any course that would bring this about.

"I know that one person can make another love him," he continued, "and I am going to make you. You may hate me now, but when you see the depth and steadfastness of my affection your heart will soften. Right is right and you must love me. Love is such a big overpowering thing that it can not be resisted."

"But I won't love you—that is all. I can't and I won't. I tell you I hate you. It makes no difference what you say or do, I will not love you."

He took his eyes off the road again and turned them toward her. A slow smile grew in the corners of his mouth. In it was confidence, the slow conquering confidence of a man who would not be put aside.

Mary felt a rush of fright. She was afraid of the smile. She acted quickly:

"I ask you to take me back to town."

"I will—when I have finished telling you that I love you. I want to save you."

"Save me from what?"

The man did not say anything for some minutes. He looked at her as if determining something in his mind. His lips parted to speak, but closed without their message. A less close observer would have said that a great struggle was going on in his mind.

"I hate to tell you," he said, biting his lips. "I had hoped that I would not have to. But you know how eager a small town is to talk—a small jay town. No one here knows anything about you; you have never told any one where you came from, who your father was or anything about you and naturally they watch every move you make with—well, with more than eagerness—with suspicion. Evidently you have no means of livelihood and you keep a servant, which in a town like this simply kindles gossip." He turned his head aside. "Is that enough?" he asked when he brought it back.

"No," she said with less manner than she had shown before.

"Well, people are beginning to talk about you and Pointer. I know it's outrageous, and I have done everything I could to smooth it over, but you know how it is in a town of this size. You drop in at his fire house and take long walks with him and I guess that some of the girls are jealous of you—you know, because you are pretty—and so it goes. His carrying you out of the fire last night hasn't helped things. I had hoped that I wouldn't have to speak of this at all." He faced full upon her. "I had hoped that a statement of my love would be sufficient and that once people knew we meant something to each other the dirty tongues would stop wagging."

Mary Mendenhall looked steadily at him. He drew the car down to a rhythmical singing. Only her intuition saved her.

"Well, let them talk. I have done nothing to be ashamed of and I shall face them out."

"What if they find out your real name?"

"There is nobody to tell them except yourself."

"I didn't mean that. Whatever I have done has been to save you."

"I could go to another city but—"

"I would follow you."

"—but I shall not. I am going to stay here and fight it out."

"Do you love me just the least little bit?" leaning over.

The girl studied for a long deliberate minute. "No."

The man was just as long in answering. "You shall."

"Please take me back at once."

Fordyce kept straight on.

"Are you going to take me back to town?"

"The air's pleasant and I prescribe it for you." His arm reached out and drew her toward him. Before she realized it he had kissed her.

She was so angry that for a moment she scarcely realized what had happened. "Let me out!" she demanded.

"Desperate cases need desperate remedies," he laughed.

"Are you going to let me out?"

"Don't be foolish, Mary—it's six miles back to town."

"Are you going to be a gentleman?"

"I'm going to keep you with me every moment than I can."

"I see you dodge the gentleman part. I suppose it is pretty late to begin."

With that she pulled at the catch on the door, swung out on the running board and then down. She gathered herself up from her knees and brushed the dust off her scanty dress.

He reversed the machine and came up behind her. "Don't be foolish. What would the people think if they saw you walking back to town alone and your clothes dusty, and when I have been doing everything I could to stop the rumors about you!"

The girl climbed over the fence and ran into the field until she could no longer hear the sound of his motor. Then Fordyce threw in

top speed and went chugging back toward Curryville.

An hour and a half later she came up the street and before she knew it she was almost abreast of the cool shady house where Clem Pointer and his sister lived. At sight of it she paused. She wanted more than anything else to go to Hulda and tell her how much she appreciated what her brother had done for her, and to pour out her thankfulness. Then she recalled what Fordyce had said of gossip about them. She had told him that she cared not what people said or thought, so long as she was innocent, but now at the moment of decision the woman in her, trained by a million grandmothers, was unable to fly in the face of convention.

If she had gone to Hulda and told of her gratitude, and of the statements and insinuations of Doctor Fordyce the stream of Curryville's history would have run in a different channel.

CHAPTER IV

SALVATION NIGHT

FOR the first time in years the morning after the fire, Clem hated to go downtown. Usually he hurried away on the slightest pretext—and he was pretty good at finding pretexts. Hulda's view of his heroism had taken all desire for recognition out of him. Every time she looked at him he felt guilty of something; he didn't know just what.

He was in the grape arbor propping up the heavily laden vines when he heard a rustling in the tree overhead. It was Garibaldi. Clem gave a joyful cry and started up after his pet, but Garibaldi loved freedom as much as his namesake had and swung to another limb and chattered mockingly into Clem's face. Clem climbed after him, but Garibaldi leaped lightly

away. Clem began to coax with honeyed voice and extended hand, but Garibaldi was perfectly satisfied to let well enough alone.

Hulda came out with a crock of potato peelings and flung them over into the chicken yard. "Land sakes alive, Clem! Whatever has got into you? You didn't get hurt in the head last night, did you?"

Clem explained his gymnastics.

"You riskin' your neck for that monkey! What if the preacher'd come by! Come down this minute!"

Clem did, but not the way his sister meant. His hand had just closed on Garibaldi when the limb on which he stood gave way and down he pitched, crumpling up where he fell.

Hulda ran to her brother's side. He groaned once and became unconscious. It took something like this to make her realize her affection —but it does most people for that matter. She sped to the neighbors' for help. When she returned Clem's eyes were open and when the doctor arrived he pronounced it only a wrenched shoulder. The news spread and by

noon the house was full of sympathetic visitors.

As Clem sat in the parlor one could but admire his blue eyes, patched in as they were with a hundred wrinkles from being so much in the western sun. They were kindly, sometimes dreamy eyes, wandering away off over the hills and building new worlds of their own, but always coming back with a friendly twinkle. Slow in speech was Clem, always willing to be the listener, hesitating long before opening his heart to a stranger.

In the kitchen Hulda gave directions to her assistants. When there was anything the matter with Clem she couldn't say or do enough for him.

"Clem's got a wonderful constitution. I never saw a man with such a constitution. The fall would have killed any other man, but he'll be out to-morrow. The salt's in the white bowl, Mrs. Knabb. And not afraid of anything. That's the reason he could rescue Miss Mendenhall last night. I guess it'll be a long time before this town sees anything braver'n

The limb gave way and down he pitched.

that. You know, Mrs. Ford, he hain't said hardly a word about it to me. I wanted him to tell me about it but not a word would he say. Whatever I get I have to find out from the neighbors—that's how modest he is. Put the skillet drippings in the tin can there, Mrs. Kiggins. I always save them and after they get too strong for cooking they make fine soap."

On his way back from supper Mr. Kiggins looked in. "You have a funny way of amusin' yourself," he greeted Clem. "A hero last night and a sick horse now. Bunged up your shoulder, did you? You know rheum'tism is likely to set in and go to your heart. Then it's good-by, Curryville."

Mr. Kiggins was never intended to be a comfort to the sick.

"Last night, after I got home from the fire my rheum'tism set in again. Got wet, you know. Almost in the same place your shoulder's knocked out. I hadn't any more'n hit the feathers until it seemed to me seven devils with chin whiskers grabbed me and begun

pullin' the hide off my shoulder in strips, peelin' it off like takin' off old wall-paper. Once in a while a chunk of meat'd stick on the wall-paper, the blood oozin' out, and they'd scrape it off with a paddle and clean the paddle on the back of a butcher knife.

"But I ain't a man to talk about my own afflictions. Have you tried a mustard poultice? I remember comin' to this very house, before you moved here, to see Kyle Fuller who'd fell down the cellar steps and twisted his shoulder about like yours. He was settin' right over in that corner where you are. He didn't think it amounted to much at first and let it run along. I told him to look out for the rheum'tism but he didn't pay any attention. In just nine days I closed up the White Front to go to his funeral!

"Miss Mendenhall dropped in to the store to-day and was asking about you. Well, I must run along, Clem. I'm glad to find you so cheerful but you can't tell how quick rheum'-tism'll set in."

Clem recovered rapidly, but there was a

wound inside that could not be rebuilt by new tissues. Why didn't he receive some word of thanks, or at least an acknowledgment from Miss Mendenhall? Surely she could send him a note.

Before he knew it camp-meeting week was upon him. Each year he dreaded the coming of camp-meeting more and more, and each year it was a keener enjoyment to Hulda. Clem was not an orthodox believer and it grated on him to have to bow down in unbelieving worship.

The meetings were held in Turner's Grove, just far enough from Curryville to get washing water from the river and near enough to carry cooking water from the town pump. Monday afternoon every believing family moved out in a tent, only running back home often enough to replenish the visible food supply, sleeping and camping in the tent until after the rousing, big Sunday night meeting.

Bright and early the wagons of the farmers came rolling in, the father sitting in the front seat, the seat tilting to his side from long use.

Behind him sat his wife with the baby in her arms and beside her the next youngest. Behind her sat the girls, their bright bows fluttering, and one boy sweltering in a heavy coat too tight across the shoulders and too short in the sleeves. In a leather bottomed chair sat the grandmother, a faded quilt over her knees to keep the dust off her black alpaca.

The families drew together for their meals, kneeling around in a circle, the men sitting in groups, each trying to keep a napkin from sliding off one knee, talking crops; the women putting the jam on the biscuits, elbow to elbow, discussing the sermon. The boys, a chicken leg in one hand and a pear preserve in the other, scuffled and giggled, while the little girls, with their skirts carefully drawn up, clustered together sharing secrets. The dinner was brought in a big basket with a lid and handles that folded together over it. Just as certain as dinner-time came the glass of elderberry jelly was certain to be upset. It had a small bottom and a tin top. Sticking out from under the cover were ears of paper and just as surely

as one of the boys tried to open it, just as surely was he bound to cut his finger on the tin cap. He would look at it a minute, funny little wrinkles in his chin, then as the blood began to ooze out he would run to his mother and fling his arms around her neck. She would take the big tin dipper from the cedar bucket that always made the water taste as though it had polliwogs in it, pour a cupful over the injured member and bind it up.

It was wonderful what that dinner basket could hold. You wouldn't think there was enough in it for one hungry man and still a family could always ask in a friend or two. Tucked down against the side was the salt for the radishes, and on the very bottom, bound together with a thread, were the tooth-picks.

Some time or other during the meeting Rick Oody was sure to come staggering down the sidewalk, lurching against the hitch-racks, spreading his fingers out into a stiff fan and righting himself slowly like a ship in distress; stumbling over a loose board and turning to

mouth awful imprecations on it while the boys in their stiff dusty shoes gathered about him in a speechless open-mouthed swarm. He would reach into his hip pocket and with his fingers gripped around the flask gurgle down its red contents. Then he would send the bottle whirling over his shoulder, the lees slewing out until the flask buried itself in the grass. After he had gone the boys would gather around the bottle, looking at it silently, walking around it until some bolder one touched it with his toe when they would all draw back as though it was a striking snake.

Clem had watched it all for years, and he knew that just as sure as they had a camp-meeting, there was certain to be some old man there with chin beard and no teeth who leaned forward on his cane and chewed. Clem never knew what he chewed, but hour after hour his chin beard would bob up and down, silently, unceasingly. Clem would try to keep his eye off the chewing chin by fastening it on the gilt topped Bible on the platform but

in a few minutes it would swing back to the bobbing beard.

Even on the last night when the Reverend Sadnow was climbing to his climax, when he was stalking back and forth across the platform, plowing his fingers through his long hair, describing the terrors of the fire everlasting, with snakes coming up and snapping their fangs into you—yes, you—time after time, and balls of fire rolling up and down you, parting and becoming two every time you tried to claw one off, Clem's eyes would be drawn irresistibly to the old man leaning forward with both hands clasped over the top of his cane, his whiskers silently falling and rising.

Camp-meeting week was the joy of Hulda's life. In the mornings she taught Sunday-school and passed books for the singing. In the evening she plead with sinners. She would rise in her seat, cast her eye back over the crowd until she saw some unsaved creature and then bear down on him. Whenever she arose there was a sudden stirring among the

sinners at the far end of the tent and often hasty exits.

When Salvation Night came—the last sermon—she was so wrought up that she was ready to save the whole world. As the Reverend Sadnow leaned over and pounded the Bible, going into a detailed description of the lake of fire and the picket of fangs, Hulda swung her black-bordered palm leaf fan faster and faster. When he stepped down off the platform and raised his arms over his head inviting sinners to come up and save themselves from a sulphurous eternity, Hulda arose and surveyed the audience, seeking for a soul without the pale.

Her eyes wandered until they fastened themselves on a figure propped limply against a tent pole. Lifting her skirt with the thumb and forefinger of a black cotton-gloved hand, she stepped over the pine plank that supported the seats and went rustling down the aisle. Those on the ends of the seats held their breath and huddled over till she passed, turn-

ing their faces with advertised relief as she swept by the danger zone.

"Are you ready to surrender your heart, Brother Oody?" she asked in a voice to be heard over the whole auditorium.

"Who, me?" he asked thickly.

"Yes, Brother Oody. Do you want to spend an eternity in a lake of living fire?"

His eyes ran across the seats and climbed up into the face of an old crony. If he gave in he would be laughed at; he must not be laughed at. "I ain't afraid," he answered defiantly. "I'm a reg'lar muskrat." His eyes leaped back to the crony and came away satisfied.

Hulda laid her hand on his arm, her voice rising. "Rick Oody, if there's anybody in all Curryville that needs the cleansing power of salvation it's you. Instead of me coming after you, you ought to be coming down the aisle on your knees praying for forgiveness." She gave his arm a tug and Rick wavered as if about to pitch forward. "You're worse than a muskrat—you're—"

Every eye in the tent was fastened on the two. The Reverend Sadnow had slowly lowered his arms and had come part way down the aisle as if to interfere, and Judge Woodbridge had half risen. Suddenly Clem appeared at her side.

"Come on away, Hulda," he whispered. "He's drunk. He don't know what he's saying."

Hulda's body pivoted at her waist. "Clem Pointer," she began, the thin trembling thread of her voice rising higher, "don't you interfere with the work of the Lord. Just because you don't belong you needn't be trying to keep your fellowman from being saved."

"Amen, amen, Sister Pointer," called out the Reverend Sadnow.

"But, Hulda, he ain't himself—"

"Go preach ye the gospel to every living creature. Ain't he living? Go back to your seat, Clem Pointer. I know what I'm doing." She put her hand on his shoulder and gave him a shove. Humbled, the eyes of the entire audience on him, Clem hesitated a moment, then

stumbled back to his seat. Every nerve in his body was throbbing; he kept his eyes fixed on the ground. Only a few days before he had thought himself a hero and now he was humiliated before all Curryville.

Hulda gave Rick's sleeve a tug and started down the aisle, chanting, "Salvation's free, salvation's free, hallelujah."

Rick held back, his heels planted. "I don't care what you're givin' away—I don't want any of it."

Hulda dropped his arm and he went sprawling. She towered over him as he looked up from his hands and knees. "You ain't fit to live in this town," biting off the words one at a time. "And don't you ever be coming around my house again for work." But Rick didn't hear; he was crawling for cover with Hulda at his heels. "Who's going to go to your funeral? Did you ever think of that?"

No greater stigma could hang over the memory of a person, according to Hulda, than to go out of the world attended only by a small band of appreciative mourners.

As immediate safety was more to be sought than parting glory, Rick darted outside with fine disregard for a well-attended funeral.

Hulda, with her chin held high, walked back to her seat, raised her skirt between black thumb and finger, and picked up her mourning palm leaf.

"Glory be to hallelujah!" shouted the Reverend Sadnow, slapping his hands. "Everybody stand and sing while the repentant sinners seek the altar."

As old *Ninety-Eight,* led by Gertie Knabb, rolled up, Clem tried to lift his foot over the seat to slip away from his disgrace. His sister caught him by the sleeve. "Stay here—the preacher's coming home with us to-night!"

Clem sank back, his hands slipping helplessly into his lap. He always felt guilty when Reverend Sadnow fastened his big accusing eyes on him. Now to have him brought home and kept, he had no idea how long, was more than he could stand. Clem raised his eyes and shuddered at sight of the tall gaunt figure.

The Reverend Sadnow had high square

shoulders; from them hung yards of black clerical cloth. His face was a long mirror of sadness. The Reverend Sadnow had a habit of stuffing each hand up the sleeve of the other arm and standing apparently handless, like a great crippled raven. Clem could not look at him without feeling the misery of the world creeping over him.

The first out of the choir to welcome the reborn into their new life was Doctor Fordyce. His words were highly polished and patently hollow. Even as he spoke his eyes were on Miss Mary Mendenhall.

After everybody had shaken hands with the new refugees from this world of sin the meeting broke up. The lanterns cast long figures on the grounds, opening and shutting with each step like great pairs of scissors. One pair of scissors that wabbled uncertainly, cutting the night in grotesque patterns, mumbled, "I ain't goin' to have any funeral. They can jes' take me down to the Bend and shovel in the dirt."

The camp-meeting was over.

Slowly Hulda, Clem and the clergyman took

their way home. Reverend Sadnow hung one loose leg over the other, pushed his hands out of sight and shoved down on his spine. For an hour he droned out his beliefs on everything from infant baptism to the burning bush, Hulda sitting forward on her chair absorbing every word; then he drew a long thin hand out of its black poke and reached for the Bible. After he had finished the chapter, Hulda glanced warningly at Clem, and Clem slowly slid to his knees. When the blanket blessing was finished Clem rose unsteadily and lighted the lamp for the guest to use in the spare bedroom.

"I hope you'll excuse the appearance of your room to-night, Brother Sadnow," began Hulda. "I've been away all this week of course and was so rushed last week that I couldn't get it fixed up. I know it ain't fit to sleep in, but you'll just have to excuse me this time." This was Hulda's specialty. The room was at spotless as new snow; to hear her talk you would think that it was better than sleeping in husks only because there was a pillow, but

"Robbers are after me," screamed the shrunken face

in truth every pin in the heart-shaped cushion on the bureau was stuck in the sawdust exactly the same distance.

After the door had closed on the guest, Hulda sat down across the table from Clem. She looked at him sadly for several minutes; twice she cleared her throat; each time Clem stiffened. He ran his finger up and down the yellow crack in the table top, preparing his defense.

"Clem," she said at last, choosing her words with a deliberation that Clem knew too well, "I want to have a talk with you. You know what it's about. When I was trying to do something for the Lord to-night why did you act that way before the whole meeting?"

Clem parted his lips in explanation, but before a word could form, there was a wild rattle of fingers against the door and a gaunt white-robed figure burst into the room. Its hair was tousled and below the nightgown two thin bare ankles darted in and out.

"Robbers are after me," screamed the shrunken face. "I heard them in the room and

jumped out of bed and wrestled with one of them, but he got away. He squealed like a pig."

Although he didn't say so one could see that the Reverend Sadnow had had a severe hand-to-hand struggle with the robbers, and that it was only by rare presence of mind that he escaped. If there had been only one robber he would have captured him of course, but with the odds against him he had to give up. Even though his face seemed strangely shriveled and his voice tagged with a certain whistling sound, Hulda looked at him in admiration.

When Clem reached for the lamp there was a near danger. After all Clem was her brother. "Don't risk your life," begged Hulda, catching Clem by the arm. "They'd as soon kill you as to look at you."

She rushed to the pantry and came back in a moment with a rusted revolver. "Now be careful, Clem. You remember old Mr. Shultz, who was shot right on our street one night and killed."

A pace behind her brother she came with the light, shading her eyes with her free hand.

Clem pushed open the door and peered around. Draped over the back of a chair was the clerical black coat and wadded up on the seat were the trousers. An overturned plush chair and a stereoscope knocked off the center table blazed the guest's hasty exit. But there was no one in the room.

Something stirred on top of the headboard and all eyes swung toward it. There sat Garibaldi. In one paw he clutched a set of false teeth!

A smile spread over Clem's face, but when Hulda saw the maker of the mischief she caught the little creature by the neck and gave it a resounding slap. It squealed pitifully and its legs began to stiffen. With set lips she marched to the door and flung it headlong into the yard. As it struck the ground it gave a squeak like the response a toy dog makes when squeezed. It did not stir and Clem's heart sank.

Slowly Hulda sat down in her chair in the sitting-room, propped her elbows on the marble top and faced Clem. Long and steadily

she bored him through; her lips parted slowly, like tearing wet paper.

"Clem, I don't understand you. I have prayed for you time and time again and set you a good example but you don't seem to improve any." Her hand went under the table and came up with the leather Bible, worn and frayed at the corners. Hulda closed her eyes and her lips moved. She was asking for higher guidance in finding a chapter that would impress Clem with his sins. The chapter should contain something that would leap out and bring wayward Clem to his knees. She opened the book and pointed to a chapter.

"The Lord has selected this chapter and may He fill your heart with compunction."

It was Numbers and told of the journeys of the children of Israel; how they removed from Mount Shapher and encamped in Haradah; how they removed from Haradah and pitched in Makheloth; how they removed from Makheloth and encamped at Tahath, following them patiently from Succoth into the plains of Moab, stumbling after them

whether they encamped in easily pronounced Hor or pitched their tents in different Kehelathah.

There wasn't very much about the chapter to leap out and bring Clem to his wayward knees. He felt sorry for the poor wandering Israelites, but he could not see just why because the nomadic children had encamped in Makheloth he should be held responsible for Garibaldi getting Reverend Sadnow's teeth and bringing embarrassment to Curryville.

Hulda's chin was in her hands and her eyes were still boring into him. The wet paper tore again:

"I hope you will take this chapter to heart and pray over it. You stirred me up so tonight that I know I will not be able to sleep. How will I look in the morning when Brother Sadnow comes in? I want you to go down to the drug store and get me some sleeping powders. The yellow ones ain't such a taste. Think of this chapter every step of the way. In the morning Brother Sadnow will pray with you."

As Clem laced his shoes Hulda's eyes watched him sternly; they followed him to his hat accusingly.

The door cut off the parallelogram of light and Clem felt his way down the steps. In a choking whisper he called out: "Garibaldi! Garibaldi!"

A cricket under a brick was droning away as if so sleepy that it couldn't keep it up much longer; a leaf patted the roof; away at the other end of town a dog mourned a thousand lost ancestors. Down toward the river a homeward bound rig rolled over the bridge, the sound coming up like thunder away at the other end of the world.

But Garibaldi did not answer.

Then Clem turned toward the river.

CHAPTER V

NOT EVEN A NOTE

CLEM kept in the middle of the street where footsteps were lightest, down past the planing mill, and around Diedrich Bend—the same road that Rick Oody so often followed on his grim journeys. The Flemmings' dog charged him, plowing its feet into the road in order not to bump against him. "Here, King—what's the matter? Don't you know me?" King quieted down at the familiar voice and in a moment was licking Clem's hand.

"Garibaldi's dead," mumbled Clem. "Killed! He screeched like a rabbit. 'Don't you interfere with the work of the Lord. You needn't be tryin' to keep your fellowman from being saved.' No, he ain't going to pray with me in the morning."

He paused. He was before the old Kemp house. The carpenters and plasterers had done their work. It was closed, and cold in the moonlight.

"Not even a note," he mumbled bitterly, then hurried toward the river.

The Hinkson sprawled across the landscape, twisting sluggishly in and out among the trees. A flat-bottomed skiff tugged peacefully at its rope; a fish-pole, sticking in the mud, bent listlessly out over the moving mirror.

For several minutes Clem stood in contemplation, when the flutter of a restless nighthawk brought him back to himself. Swinging over the wire fence, he strode to a spot where the sand and loam mixed to an ashy gray, and pulled off his coat. Putting his hand into a pocket of the coat he tore it open, then ripped the collar. Back and forth he stepped —tramping up the ground. He threw off his hat and trampled it into the earth with his heel. He tugged at his suspender and threw the loose piece to one side. He started back

and at the fence stopped to survey his work. No one could doubt that a final struggle had taken place on the silent bank.

As he was getting over the fence his foot slipped and down his hand came on the wire. A ragged gash lay white an instant, then filled with red. He mumbled thick words and was on the point of turning back to the river to bathe the wound when he paused. Looking around he gathered up a heavy stick, clasped it with his bleeding hand and pulling a few hairs from his head imbedded them with his thumb-nail. Then he flung the stick into the woods. Stooping he held the wounded finger in the stream a moment and swung back over the fence.

He retraced his steps up the road and when King came running out Clem met him with soft encouraging words. "I'm going to have a few days of comfort in my life," he whispered to King, glad of an opportunity to talk. "I ain't ever had a day to myself in my life —been bossed around since I had pockets.

The only fun I ever have's when I'm alone down at the fire house. She didn't thank me —not even a note!"

Keeping to the side of the road, in the grass, that his footprints might not show, he hurried back to town. One light was flickering in the Owl Drug Store and Clem knew that the clerk was sleeping peacefully behind the prescription mirror.

Clem crept around to the rear of the Methodist church, of which he was caretaker, and fitted his key to the basement door. Pushing it open, he went in and drew a match across the seat of his trousers; shading it he took down an oil lamp from its shelf on the wall and touched the wick. In the corner was a high-posted wooden bed; piled on the window shelves were heaps of books and stacked in the corner rows of leaflets and Sunday-school lessons, dusty and thumbed.

There was enough reading there to last him a month—and no doubt a lot of it was about heroes.

Climbing out of his clothes he piled into

bed, sighing with contentment and luxury. For the first time in his life he wouldn't have anybody to rout him out until he felt good and ready. Could there be any greater pleasure in the world?

"I guess they'll be surprised to-morrow when I don't show up," he said, nesting his ear into a comfortable pillow. It didn't occur to him that he himself might be surprised.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRIT IN THE PANTRY

WHILE Clem, a few days later, was lost in the delicious depths of a book, leaning back in laziness and luxury, a long *booo—oom* rolled up from the river. But he paid no attention to it.

With his face to the colored glass of the window he could hear numbers of people hurrying by, moving much faster than the average citizen in Curryville was accustomed to move. But still he thought nothing of it.

When night came he would slip back to his own home and help himself to provisions. On the second of these expeditions, as he was reaching in the bread-box, he heard a stir in the front room. He shrank back into the corner and pulled the tea-towel rack before his face.

"I tell you, Mrs. Kiggins, I know this place

is haunted. I know his spirit's come back. That bottle of elderberry wine Sister Knabb gave me last spring when I had the grip disappeared night before last and you know how much Clem loved elderberry. *Hss-h*—I believe his spirit's here now! I can always tell when Clem's around—by his tracks."

"Where do you think he—it—is?" asked Mrs. Kiggins, a bit awed.

"In the pantry—that's where he'd naturally be."

"I'm goin' right in there and see!" exclaimed Mrs. Kiggins determinedly.

"Don't you do it," cried Hulda, seizing Mrs. Kiggins by the arm. "It means death to go again' spirits. Old Mis' Rhodes saw her husband's spirit after he had tumbled down that coal shaft and the next week she fell off the back porch and broke her arm."

"You ain't sure there is spirits," argued Mrs. Kiggins.

"Yes, I am. Ain't I been missing bread and jam and cake right along? That's just what Clem's spirit would take!"

"What's that creakin'?" demanded Mrs. Kiggins.

"I don't hear anything."

"I think it's breathing," insisted Mrs. Kiggins. "I'm going to—"

"*Hss-h*—Mrs. Kiggins, spirits don't breathe. It tain't a good sign, an' that very night a big dog bayed under my window."

"I'm goin' to make sure—"

"Don't you dare, Mrs. Kiggins. This is my house. I'll be the one that'll have to suffer. If Clem loves me enough to come back you hain't goin' to scare him away."

Here the voices ceased, and Clem, bending almost double to keep from making a sound, slipped out and back to the church. He was too nervous to go into its black depths and so he wandered down the street. He wondered how the fire house looked, so cutting across lots he came up behind it. The key was in its accustomed place. When he came around in front he stared in open-mouthed astonishment. Pasted on the front door was a big placard. The head-lines leaped out at

him, and with a match cupped in his hand he read the smaller print:

$1,000 REWARD

FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE

ARREST AND CONVICTION

OF THE MURDERER OF

CLEMENT LANGDON POINTER

He is now at large. Robbery is supposed to be the motive. The deed was committed with a club on Flemming's side of the Hinkson, Sunday night the 18th.

$500 WILL BE PAID

for the return of Mr. Pointer's body dead or alive. He was 5 feet, 10 inches; black hair with gray getting into it. Nose small and turned up a bit. Ears big. Eyes blue, and he had a mole on the inside of his left thumb.

MISS HULDA POINTER,

Curryville, Mo. His Sister.

After his match had flickered out he stood several minutes in dull wonder. He could

easily imagine how excited the town must be and he understood now that it had not been stumps that were being blasted but that his fellow citizens had been firing over the murky depths of the Hinkson in the hope of raising his body. He would not dare to go back now; he would be ashamed to show his face and the thought of meeting Hulda made him shiver as though in a draft. He would have to stock his basement room well and not stir till the excitement had blown over. But three days more would be Sunday and then he was certain to be discovered.

He wandered down toward the railroad station, turning his trouble over and over in his mind. A blaze of light swung around a curve and danced on the side of the little red station; in a moment the midnight passenger train jarred to a standstill. Only two persons got off; alighting, they ran to the baggage coach ahead and backed a truck up alongside the door. Two dogs leashed together were helped down. The animals were long and thin and had big heads with wide ears flapping

down until they almost met under their jaws. The faces were as wrinkled and weazened as an old woman's. They tugged at their leashes impatiently, bobbing their heads up and down.

Then suddenly it burst over Clem that they were bloodhounds and that one of the men was the sheriff from the county seat and the stranger was the animals' keeper. They had come after him.

The conductor's lantern cut two vertical lines; the train groaned and in a minute its rear lights were winking around a curve.

The dogs tugged the men up the street, their heads tilting up and down like the heads of toy turtles mounted in a glass case so that the slightest jar would send them bobbing.

The agent threw the safety light and turned back to his cot.

Clem sat down on the edge of the platform. He didn't dare go back and be the laughing-stock of the whole town. And what would Hulda say? What wouldn't she say? He sat up with an idea: in an hour a freight would be along. All his life he had longed

to see the world—to be out where people were doing things, where there were heroes—and now was his chance. He would take the freight and his chance.

When the cyclop's eye of the train swung into sight Clem skipped across the track and dropped behind the siding. The great living mass chugged, roared and screamed to a standstill; the fireman ran up the ladder of the tender like a monkey and swung the iron lip of the water tank around.

A lone figure, bleared by the shadow of a box-car, ran along the track till it came to an open door, rested its feet on the brace rods and swung into the dark mouth of the car.

The train lurched forward, the gray outlines of the stock-yards flashed by and the freight was under way. Clem held his breath with the recklessness of it, watching the black kaleidoscope unroll before him.

Something in the corner stirred. Clem gave a swift glance out as if calculating the possibilities, then drew into the shadow. The object crawled forward and Clem flattened

against the wall. He stared with all his eyes into the darkness; one moment it looked tall and hairy and the next as though it was sticking close to the floor and crawling up on him. Even with his back to the wall and his heels braced it seemed to him as if any moment he might be rolled into the arms of the creature. Maybe, after all, the thing hadn't seen him, and he could jump off at the next stop and get away. Then something away up in the middle of his head began to pull and twitch and he felt his ribs rising. He clapped his finger to his upper lip and mashed it against his teeth but his ribs kept rising. Then his ribs snapped back into place with a loud "kerchoo!"

"It's awfully dusty in here," said a voice out of the darkness. "It makes me do that, too!"

Clem pushed his shoulders against the wall again, his heart pounding wildly, but made no answer.

"Which way you goin', bo?"

"Down the line."

"Got a side-kick?"

Clem hesitated, his heart beating high while the car rattled and pitched. "It tain't just exactly clear what you're driving at."

"Are you traveling alone?"

"Yes."

"Been havin' any trouble with the bulls?"

"I—I live in the city—in Curryville. I guess you've heard of it. It's got the finest I. O. O. F. hall in this part of the state."

"That's where they've got a froth factory called Joe's Place, ain't it? Worst booze in the state—one drink and you'll fight your grandmother; two and she can sew you up in a sheet and whale you with a mop handle!"

The figure slid toward Clem: "Got a glim?"

"I guess I don't hear very well with this racket goin' on. I didn't ketch what you said."

"Got a match?"

"Glad to 'commodate," returned Clem, setting one elbow into the floor like a brace-pole and burrowing a hand into his crumpled-up trousers pocket. "It's broke in two, but I guess it'll do business."

Their fingers fumbled in the dark and in a moment a spitting line of light leaped from a heavy shoe-sole. Two thick hands cupped it and fitted it into the thick black bowl. The flame dipped out of sight, leaped up victoriously and was sucked out of sight again. Two fat stubbled cheeks belched out a funnel of smoke and melted into the background. A finger and thumb growing out of the darkness lifted the charred splinter, which turned its one angry eye accusingly around as if to find who had blotted out its life, and smeared it into the floor. All was blackness again.

"I meant the brakies. They're gettin' meaner and meaner on this road and every time they catch a fellow he's got to cough up or they'll shine his block. There's one bull on this line I'm goin' to get and get good and hard. A pal of mine was ridin' the blind when this bull piked him; Rudy coughed up every cent he had and just before he got to the end of the division the bull come again. Rudy told him he'd passed over every red he had. With that the brakie smashed him in the face

with his lantern, and when he come to his knees, kicked him off, jowls over janders, like a wet blanket. I've got his number and some night when we're goin' good there'll be a sickening thud and next mornin' some section boss'll find a few stray joints and a loose leg scattered along the right of way. There was nuthin' Rudy wouldn't do for a pal. Once when he was lyin' in a sand-house and me sick he climbed in the back window of the station agent's house, locked his wife in the cellar —her hollerin' down brakes—and snatched a plate of soup for me just because I had fever in the head. You'd loved Rudy."

"You mean that a brakeman kicked Mr. Rudy off when the train was runnin' and killed him?"

"I guess that's the way a language professor'd put it."

"Do—do they often kick people off like that?"

"Every night."

Clem edged toward the corner.

The car roared and rattled, pitched and

plunged for half an hour without a word being spoken. Clem shuddered, turning over in his mind what would happen if one of the train crew came upon them. He couldn't go back to Curryville with those sad-eyed dogs there and face Hulda and everybody to laugh at him. In the car with his thick-shouldered companion was like being in a dark room with an unknown animal.

"Been on the road long?" boomed a voice out of the blackness.

"No!"

"I thought you hadn't the way you got in with your elbows. What's your line?"

"I don't follow you."

"How do you get the kale?"

Clem studied for a minute. "Are you an American?"

The man in the darkness laughed, his voice climbing over the rattle of the trucks. "You're all right, bo. I mean how do you get your cash?"

Clem nervously drew up his hand to his wallet. Plainly the stranger was trying to

find if he had any. "I just joined the road to-night."

"You mean that when you crawled up in this car like a sick cow that it was your first time out?"

"Yes."

"Been hitting the dirt?" asked the other quickly, in amazement.

"You've got the best of me, stranger."

"I mean, have you been goin' the country roads?"

"No, I just got on to-night."

The other blew through his nostrils in wonder and the very whistle of it asked what in the world could a person be doing all his life if he hadn't been traveling either by railroad or across the country? Suddenly he turned on Clem as if the whole explanation had just dawned on him. "You ain't cracked anything, have you?" he asked anxiously.

"I guess I'm purty dumb, but about half of your words don't seem to be where they belong."

"I mean, you ain't in the soap and blanket business, are you?"

"No, I'm chief of the fire department," Clem explained with pardonable pride.

The man in the dark sighed as though a great weight had been taken off his mind and added as if to himself: "You ain't ever cracked a bank or you'd get me. Say, pardner, why don't you go home? There ain't anything in railroadin'."

"I couldn't do that," exclaimed Clem quickly. "I ain't got any home any more."

"You ain't got any home and ain't goin' anywhere," the other took up. "Well, then, you just fall in with me. My name's Hagan—Mr. Brassy Hagan—but I've almost forgot the last part myself. I'm in the circus business."

"Oh!" exclaimed Clem with delight. "You don't happen to be an animal trainer, do you? —I can't see your clothes!"

"No, that ain't my department. I'm not under the big top. I do missionary work among the hey-rubes. I was a schilliber—

stake and chain wagon—for a while, but tappin' stakes ain't no occupation for a gentleman so I cut out to where the big money was. I'm in the optical business—handling the elusive pea, proving that the hand is quicker than the eye. My great call in life is to prove to the tall grass gents that they can't believe all they see, by shifting a well-trained pea from one English walnut to another and chargin' them for it."

"I don't know's I ever met anybody with that occupation before," returned Clem.

Brassy laughed.

"I've got a good thriving business. This last town, I was in the midst of my lesson proving that the hand is quicker than the eye when a gentleman come up and took treatment. After he had found that his eye had deceived him he pulled back his coat and there on his suspender was a silver plate with engravin' on it and he insisted that your professor come down and be the guest of the city. I couldn't excuse myself and make a duck until the rest of the circus was gone six hours.

You ought to be a good capper; I tell you what I'll do—I'll take you into partnership. How'd you like that?"

"Then I'd be a member of the circus company?" asked Clem eagerly.

"Sure—just as much as I am."

"I'll do it," cried Clem, edging over toward Brassy. "I've allus wanted to travel with a circus. It'll be a great education to me."

"It sure will," agreed Brassy, without explaining just what he meant.

A long lonesome whistle rolled out and the train began to slacken.

"We pile off here," said Brassy. "The circus train'll still be loadin' but we can slip into the sleepin'-car without anybody gettin' wise and hit the hay for a spell."

The car pitched forward and sullenly settled back like a live thing. Brassy leaped out on the opposite side from the station and motioned Clem to follow.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRODUCTIVE PEA

THE sleeping-car of the circus was on a siding when Brassy led Clem up and waved him in. An oil lamp with a smoky reflector behind it was clinging to the wall, while on each side of the aisle were rows and rows of cots, one above the other, like great pie shelves.

Brassy went down the aisle slapping the curtains. "Here's an empty one," he called. "Pile in—you'll know when to get up all right!"

Turning aside, Brassy worked a moment at his collar, leaned over and tugged his shirt off over his head and was soon out of sight.

Up and down the car rose gurgles and groans, spurting up and dying away, like sound geysers. Shirts, dirty and rumpled,

drooped dejectedly on hooks. Fastening one tired knee over the other Clem unlaced his shoes and climbed on to one of the shelves.

It seemed to him that his ear had scarcely flattened on the pillow before there was a wreck, or at least a storm at sea. A wild hammering filled the car as if some destructive soul was trying to pull it to pieces before its occupants could possibly scramble into their clothes. Clem thrust his head out and saw one of the helpers pounding with a heavy stick a sheet of iron fastened to the wall. Then he understood that it was the call to breakfast.

Clem tumbled into his clothes in a minute and was outside before another head had appeared. Slowly the men came out, pulling themselves into their jumpers and plowing their knuckles into their eyes.

The train was on a spur waiting to be unloaded. Clem walked its full length. Everywhere was the peculiar smell of the circus. Some of the animals were contentedly chewing their food while others tramped restlessly back and forth.

Already boys and men were gathering to see the unloading, much brighter-eyed than the grumbling circus helpers. The heavier animals had been taken off and the schillibers were unloading the lighter ones when Brassy appeared, a cap pulled over his eyes and his cheeks raggeder than ever.

"Mornin'," he greeted shortly, and jerked his head for Clem to follow.

Brassy tramped down the line of cars in silence, drawing up before the supply car where three or four sleepy hands were listlessly tugging at rolls of canvas. Brassy laid hold and motioned Clem to a corner. The canvas and stakes were thrown on to truck wagons and carted to the show grounds.

"Better stick pretty clost to me till I speak to 'the colonel,' " said Brassy briefly.

When the stakes were laid out for the dining tent, the boss of the chain and stake gang eyed Clem suspiciously, then asked, "Want to try your hand at the sledge?"

Clem willingly picked up the sledge and taking turn about with a driver soon drove

the stake to the notch. The boss nodded with approval.

After the tent was up cross-pieces were driven and the table made. It was not until late that breakfast was ready, the men climbing over the seats and dropping down on the table with their elbows. Brassy drew Clem in beside him and the two ate in silence. In the light of day Brassy looked much older than Clem had first thought him to be.

When they were getting ready for the grand, glittering and gorgeous free street parade—quoting from a poster—Clem couldn't help noticing that the grandness was getting pretty shabby and that El Shiek—the widely heralded king of camels—was decidedly moth eaten in places and had bad twinges of rheumatism. Leo, also a royal ruler in his realm, was much more peaceably inclined than he had been when the artist painted his portrait on the outside of the wagon showing him standing on a knoll, one foot slightly raised and a forbidding snarl on his tightly curled lips. To see Rose, queen among pachyderms, obediently

pushing heavy wagons about, a tired expression around her eyes, made one wish that they wouldn't have a grand, glittering and gorgeous parade this morning, but instead would give the animals a half holiday.

The band struck up and the wagons began to fall in line. Clem started toward the source of the music but bumped into a stout man. The individual was dressed in a long frock coat and peeping out from inside as though ashamed of itself was a flaming red waistcoat, while a black string tie fluttered its ends in the breeze as if to attract the eye away from the apoplexy of the waistcoat. Under the wide sombrero and in spite of the shaven cheeks Clem at last recognized his partner of the freight car.

"Puttin' on the furniture for company," returned Brassy to Clem's puzzled look. "This is our busy day. I've spoke to 'the colonel' and fixed everything up. The pickin's ought to be good to-day."

It was not just exactly clear to Clem who that mysterious individual was whom Brassy

referred to so familiarly with his martial title, nor did he know just what the pickings were, but his satisfaction at being a member of a circus troupe kept the whetstone off his curiosity.

"Yes," agreed Clem, "they ought. I don't know as I ever saw a finer day for 'em."

One of the animal trainers in his spangles, rushing by to catch up with the parade, called out to Brassy: "It's kind of late for strawberry shortcake, ain't it?"

Brassy, with his thumbs stuffed tightly in under his belt as if he could never get them out, waved his elbow and smiled.

"What does he mean?" asked Clem.

"Oh, that's just some of their talk. When this parade gets back we'll go to work."

"I guess I'm pretty slow, but what am I to do, Mr. Hagan?"

This was just the chance for Brassy. He lived and flourished on words. He could juggle them about with the ease and deftness of a Japanese acrobat handling a barrel with his feet.

"After a lot of trouble and schemin' I have at last succeeded in having you made my first understudy. I didn't know whether I was going to be able to put it over at first, but at last I brought 'the colonel' around to my way of thinking and I am happy to tell you that you are now a qualified member of this famous circus troupe—chief assistant to Professor Hagan, Ophthalmologist and Manipulator of the Moving Shells. I am carried along by this educational organization to enlighten the minds of the great mass of people who have more sinkers than sense and who do not believe that the movements of the hand are quicker than the images thrown on the retina of our organ of sight. To prove this I assemble three shells of the English walnut variety, place under one of them a single matured specimen of one of our commonest garden products—the homely pea—shift the shells rapidly with first one hand and then the other and call upon the spectators to point out which one of the three shells shelters the productive

pellet. After they have declared their certainty as to which houses the product of the pod, I ask them to back their judgment by something that goes over the counter, and after they have complied I raise the shell. Rarely—and after due reflection I might say never—does the shell designated by them cover the object of the search. To teach them humility, respect for the judgment of others and a lesson not to make the same mistake when the next circus comes to town, I take the long green and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

Clem blinked hazily for a moment. "Then the man at the door takes the tickets, does he?"

Brassy laughed. "Yes. Everybody takes all they can get. As soon as the parade's over we'll stoke up."

In a few minutes the *tra-boom, tra-boom* of the drum, sounding like thunder over on the other side of the river, came rolling in and as the head of the line swung into the grounds the gilded wagon boomed out a final swing-

ing selection. A great crowd of boys and men—boys first and seasoning off with men—flooded in on the heels of the parade.

The clown in his cart was the favorite. When he reached over and scratched the donkey with his umbrella and called out, "Whoa, love!" and it kicked up right in his face the boys yelled with glee and took it up: "Whoa, love! Whoa, love!"

The clown waved a friendly hand to Clem and disappeared into the dressing tent.

Brassy came up with a handful of bills. "When I get the game goin' you come up and unwind your pocketbook and put down a five. You win, wrap her up and blow on. Take this five and after a while when you get a wad and the crowd breaks you can slip 'em back."

Clem held the bill by the corner, as though it was a lizard by the tail. His lips parted and his breath went in. "I—I—you mean—"

"Shortcake so early?" sang out one of the circus men, hurrying by.

The flood of men and boys, with here and

there a white dress flecking the current, rolled on, swirling around the ticket wagons and eddying around the side-shows: the older men with their shirts open at the neck, heavy brass buttons swaying on their collars, and the young men tortured under high celluloids.

In a bayou of boys Brassy appeared with a folding table. Pulling up his sleeves and pushing back his sombrero, with bills weaving through his fingers, he began:

"Everybody likes a little innocent fun and amusement. It quickens the pulse, it stimulates the mind. No two pairs of eyes in the world are alike: your eyes are different from mine and both are unlike those of this here gentleman. Science has never explained this fact, but fact it is. Some eyes see fast—some slow. Strange as it may seem, the movements of the human hand are faster than the eye. If you'll gather around closer I'll endeavor to make my meanin' clearer. Boys not allowed. No crowding, please. I have here, as all may see, three half walnut shells, and everybody who cares to look may see this pea. I put

this favorite of the garden under one of the shells, pass my hands over them a few times, moving some, shifting others—and who knows where the pea is? The gentleman was right. You tell us, stranger: wrong. Sometimes you hit it—sometimes you miss it. Boys, did you ever hear the story about the girl goin' into a store to buy a pair of silk stockings? This scientific experiment'll be lots more interesting if we back up our judgment with some coin of the realm. Whatever you put down I cover. I cover it if it takes the gold out of my teeth and shoes off the baby. We must work fast, boys, for we never know who's comin'. The gentleman in the straw hat guessed it right. Keep the chicken feed —poultry's goin' up. This gentleman says five: watch me carefully—watch every movement. He wins. My loss. Who next? Some people has good eyes—some bad. Hands off the table. The quicker you play the quicker you get your money. 'How much are those silk stockings?' she says to the clerk. 'Ten dollars,' he says. 'They come pretty

high, don't they?' she says. Here's your change. 'Yes, but you're a tall woman,' he says. Who gets the next five? Ever hear the story about the blonde gettin' into the wrong berth in the Pullman train?"

Clem, standing at the edge of the crowd, marveled at the ease and rapidity with which Brassy shifted the shells; watching as carefully as he could, he could not pick the shell that housed the pea.

Something bumped his elbow. It was the clown.

"He's there with the bull," said the clown, his enameled face spreading.

"I don't see what becomes of that pea. Sometimes I would bet my old black hat that I knew where it was, but when Mr. Hagan picks up the shell it tain't there."

The clown's face parted: "Watch his little finger."

At first when Clem wove his way into the crowd he could not catch the finger at its work, but on closer scrutiny he saw the hand pass on over the spot where the pea was lying,

the finger seeming to twitch. Then he knew that Brassy had scooped it up.

A farmer boy with thick browned hands and a big presidential button on his suspenders unwrapped a five-dollar bill from the corner of a newspaper and put his money on the table. Brassy promptly covered it and shifted the shells.

"Five times on the board. Watch me carefully—it's under only one of 'em. Which one, pardner?"

A thick brown finger pointed. A small white finger twitched and the pea rolled out from under another shell, and the bills disappeared into Brassy's pocket. "One man loses —the next one lucky. Who gets the next money?"

The boy stared with hard unbelieving eyes a moment, then backed out, his face burning. He wandered over the grounds. Lost! a week's work gone at a puff. He met an older man with the same thick browned hands and drew him aside. The older man listened for several minutes, then reluctantly unwound his wallet

and handed the boy a bill. The boy darted away, out of sight of the older man, then melted into the crowd around the folding table.

"If your eyes fool you once don't let them do it again," Brassy was singing out, hitching his sleeves up higher. "It all depends on how close you watch the shells. Where is it now?"

A browned finger started to reach out but Clem pushed the hand away, and stepping out of the crowd, motioned to the boy to follow.

"Son," he said, "I saw you get this money from our father, and it's going just where the other did. You ain't any more show with him than butter in an oven. Ain't you got a girl?"

The boy reddened, and dropping his eyes, nodded.

"Hunt her up, get her reserved seats and show her a good time. Then the rows won't be so long to-morrow."

Big eyes poured their appreciation into Clem's while the tongue held still. Catching sight of a flutter of ribbons, his arms began

to swing, and in a minute the sleeve of a white dress pushed into the hook of his arm.

A heavy hand fell on Clem's shoulder. He turned to look into the flaming eyes of Brassy.

"What the hell do you mean? That was my shortcake and you jerked it out of my fingers. Instead of capping people in for me, you're driving them away. What you got to say for yourself?"

Slowly Clem's enraged face calmed. "I used to walk up one side of a row of corn and come back on the other," he returned deliberately, "and I know how hard that boy's money comes. Besides, your game ain't honest."

"Who're you to be talking? I didn't see any conductor take up your ticket on that train. Ain't you been acceptin' the hospitality of this company and ain't you workin' for me? Ain't you one of us? Your shirt's just as dirty as anybody's. Are you going to ring in for me or not?"

"Not boys like that."

That was my shortcake

"I ain't any time to talk, but suppose I wanted to holler; the rest of the gang'd fall in with me and where'd you be? They'd frame you, that's what they'd do."

"I'm not going to see any boys like that robbed in plain daylight," returned Clem doggedly.

"Say, you ain't ever told us why you left Curryville. Do you want us to telegraph back you've been pinched?"

Clem stiffened. "No, no. Only don't you see, he was young and I know just what losing five dollars—"

Brassy dropped his hand on Clem's arm familiarly. "Come on, old side-kick, the green's good. If we don't get it somebody else will. I wouldn't took any more from him, anyway. I just pull the wise ones—there ain't anybody'll give a sick fellow a five-spot quicker'n I will. Here, take these three fives and drift in every new crowd and put down a plaster. You'd be the hot chocolate for capping if your collar didn't button behind. Poultice your feet and come on."

The table under his arm, Brassy pushed through the crowd. In a minute higher than the calls of the ticket sellers rose a nasal sing-song: "Everybody likes a little innocent fun and amusement. It quickens the pulse—"

CHAPTER VIII

ALL FLESH IS GRASS

MOUTH to mouth the word flew that Clem was gone. Mr. Kiggins ran over to Judge Woodbridge's office, the morning after the disappearance, and with one foot in the window and one eye on the White Front told the judge everything that he had heard, filling in the barren details with what he imagined so that by the time he got through the judge knew a desperate-looking character had been hanging around town that day and was last seen going down Mulberry Street—the very street Clem was coming up to get the medicine.

"I was thinkin' that very night," said Mr. Kiggins, "as I was layin' there tumbling and tossing from my shoulder that we hadn't had a murder or catastrophe in this town since

the Talbot shooting, sixteen years ago this spring. My shoulder was paining me like jumping Jerusalem, just like as if somebody had me tied hand and foot and was marking their initials on my shoulder with a red-hot poker, and once in a while they would put in a deep period. I didn't waken none of my family—or we might 'a' heard the struggle—but laid there without a groan, for I say, what is the good of complaining and tellin' your troubles to other people? And while I was thinkin' how unfortunate we was, this sad crime was being committed three blocks away. There goes John Jupes now!"

The city marshal was hurrying down the street as fast as his rheumatism would let him, pinning his badge on the outside of his coat. Mr. Kiggins rushed down the stairs, all but forgetting his lame foot, his wrenched shoulder and his bad heart, locked the White Front and set out after the city officer. He found Reverend Sadnow pacing up and down the front yard, his hands pushed up his sleeves and his hair wildly tumbled.

"The work of the Lord," greeted the clerical raven. "In the midst of life we are in the midst of death. Flesh is but grass before the great Mower."

Mr. Kiggins listened to the questions Marshal Jupes put to Hulda and then returned to Reverend Sadnow. "I feel it in my bones," he said, "that it was the tramp we been seeing loafing around here for the last couple days. Let's go down the street and see if we can't find where they met."

"All flesh is grass and the nations are as a drop in a bucket," letting the words fall in measured beats of sadness.

The two started down the street.

"I was awake last night—my shoulder hurting me again like coals rolling up and down my back, never gettin' quite off, like these colored capsules with shot in them that they sell on the streets, rolling them up and down a board. Sometimes I'd think the live coals was goin' to tumble off but they'd turn around again and come thumpin' and bouncin' back."

"No one knoweth what a night will bring forth, and life is as a spark that flies upward!"

"While I was layin' there I heard something like a heavy thud, then a groan, but I laid it to my mind bein' delirious and didn't call the family. I never disturb anybody, no difference how bad off I am. Look, look!" exclaimed Mr. Kiggins, dropping on one knee, and pointing to a footprint and a torn bit of cloth. "Here's where the death struggle took place and all Curryville sleepin' peacefully—all except me, and me the only person to hear it, but sufferin' so I thought I was delirious."

"Life is a candle and death the draught that snuffs it out."

Mr. Kiggins rushed back to the house and found Marshal Jupes and laid before him his discovery, putting in a few embellishments in the way of what he had heard the night before when he was suffering from his shoulder and was half delirious. It had been a terrible hand-to-hand struggle, Clem fighting desperately, but the tramp was big and burly and

had so completely stunned him with the first blow that Clem could not see for the blood. Then all had grown silent, and Mr. Kiggins had tumbled into a fitful slumber in spite of the great pain in his shoulder as if somebody with a pair of steel nippers was pulling out chunks of flesh and tossing them gleefully on the ground.

Officer Jupes was bending over the foot-prints when up rushed Rick Oody. "I found Clem's hat and coat down by the river," he panted, "and a club with hair on it!"

Rick motioned toward Diedrich Bend, and with one accord all started in that direction. The crowd was augmented at every corner; Mr. Knabb hobbled off toward his buggy-shed and in an incredibly short time was back in his democrat wagon. Drawing up alongside Officer Jupes, he slid over in his seat and the official swung in without the rig stopping. The rural carriers, with their one-horse rigs hitched in front of the post-office waiting for the last mail, followed the crowd enviously, but finally turned back. It was a silent hushed

crowd, no one raising a voice above a hoarse whisper.

The men slipped through the barbed-wire fence, each man getting over the best way he could, none offering to hold up the wire for the person behind. Jupes was slightly in advance, Rick Oody at his heels and Judge Woodbridge close behind, followed by the others. On the muddied bank, loam spread over the sand like chocolate over ice-cream, lay the torn coat and crumpled hat. Near was a heavy stick, one end plowed into the white and black layers. The river, heavy with rich soil, in some places black, in other channels stirred with yellow clay, lapped lazily on the bank as if maliciously hiding its mystery. A woodpecker pounded on a hollow limb, thrust its yellow head around the tree, turned it to one side as if to expostulate with the invaders, then flapped noisily away. A green and black knot on a log slid into the water and a snake wriggled down the wet bank in a series of "s's" and slipped into the water without cutting a ripple.

Boys, keep out of this 'til we get some hounds

"I ain't touched a thing," whispered Rick. "I was comin' back from taking Widow Wood's horse down the river when I seen this coat. He used to ride me on his knee—"

Turning over his clay-stained hand he found a clean knuckle and plowed it into his eyes. Reaching across with his left hand, he picked up his right sleeve and wiped his eyes again. "—and tickle me in the ribs."

Marshal Jupes picked up the torn and soiled coat and cap and finally the stick.

"His hair," he said brokenly.

Marshal Jupes looked toward the black depths of the river significantly, and Judge Woodbridge nodded assent.

Placing the hat and coat back in their former position, Jupes picked up a stick and drew a circle around them. "Boys," he said, "keep out of this till we get some hounds."

The men gathered around in a little knot, hardly raising their voices above a whisper. Slowly they all turned until they faced the black and yellow layered river. An arm was raised, pointing down the current where it rolled slug-

gishly against a dirty yellow bank, and a dozen heads nodded understandingly. The men walked back to the fence, Judge Woodbridge first through and holding up the wire until all had bent under.

"I'll run to Coop Goodson's and get his seine," volunteered Rick Oody. "I'll cut across and it won't take no time." Rick turned into the timber, bending his head, every few steps, to his right sleeve and reaching across with his left hand.

As the knot of men rolled up the hill, peace settled over the river: the green and black turtle parted the thick water with a nose like the end of a stick, then crawled awkwardly up on the log again, and the snake slipped out of the water without breaking its surface and settled itself on the warm bank.

All was peace again except for one thing that moved; it was a figure slipping out of the underbrush. It paused behind a tree a moment, then walked quickly to the coat and picked it up. Next it studied the hat and

finally turned to the heavy stick with the heavy hair.

It was Rencie—Rencie Ford.

Before the men returned with the seine and began dragging the river for the body of Clem Pointer, Rencie had slipped away. However, his younger eyes had searched out something that the others had not seen. He stooped and picked it up: it was a watch-charm—a round ball of marble, with North and South America and the Old World marked off in black.

Men in overalls and heavy shirts swam in the middle of the river, turn about, diving down and keeping the seine on the bottom, while on the shore walked the older men, dragging the net. On coming ashore the black mud squirted out of the holes of their shoes. Grimly they searched the river, going back time after time over the lee waters where the current nosed into the yellow bank. Down to the mill they worked their way, shaking out the net at each haul and letting the turtles run spraddling back into the water.

When the bloodhounds came they were led to the spot and their noses pushed against the hat and coat. They swung their heads up and down wisely, shook their long ears and ran, a half-dozen times, around the spot in a circle. In their wrinkled faces was the wisdom of all the ages, but time after time they came back to the hat and coat and trotted off with their cold noses to the ground. Once one of them bayed, took a straight line, but stopped and again began making circles. Finally they came back to the hat and coat and stood wagging their tails and bobbing their heads.

"The scent's cold," explained the sheriff, and leashed the animals.

Parties were formed and for days the surrounding woods were searched and every thicket plumbed, but the mystery was just as far from solution as ever. Mr. Kiggins supplied the powder from the White Front and shots were fired over the river, but the river flowed on as sluggishly as before.

Rewards were posted and nearly every day came word that the body had been found, or

that a suspicious character had been picked up in a neighboring county, only for a later word to contradict everything. Slowly Curryville settled back into its routine; that is, all except one. This was Rencie Ford.

He became more alert and agile than ever. This was the opportunity he had been waiting for all his life; all his studying and piecing together of torn letters could now be utilized.

Not one word did he say to any one about the two-hemisphere watch-charm. One thing he knew, and that was that it did not belong to Mr. Pointer. The simplest way to unravel the mystery was to find the owner of the charm. But this wasn't simple, not by a great deal. Still no murder mystery was easy to unravel. The first steps were, of course, to find a clue and a motive. He had found the clue, but why should anybody wish to harm Clem Pointer? He was the most likable man in the world and everybody was his friend. Robbery was not the motive, for he had no money with him. That anybody should raise a hand against him for his money was ridiculous.

He went to see Miss Pointer, and swung the conversation around to Clem's early life. "Do you think, Miss Pointer, that at any time Mr. Pointer ever had trouble with anybody who'd store it up and hold it against him all their life?"

"No, Rencie, no. He never harmed a kitten. There wasn't a person in the world that wouldn't walk around a block to shake hands with him and talk weather. Do you know how long it took him sometimes to walk seven blocks from the post-office to this house? Mostly an hour, and never under forty-five minutes."

"But didn't he ever have any trouble with anybody so that it could smolder in the other person?" insisted Rencie hopefully.

"Yes, he did," replied Hulda thoughtfully, while Rencie leaned forward expectantly. "One time he took a girl to a box social where they auction off the lunch boxes and you don't know whose you are getting. Hig Beamer got an old maid's instead of the one he wanted and he threw it out the window right in front

of her. Clem—I can see him now, the way he rose up and motioned his forefinger like this, and got Hig Beamer outside. Clem's tongue was sticking out and I'd never seen him do that before. After a bit Clem come back; his eye was bleeding and he kept one hand in his pocket, but Hig Beamer didn't come back at all. Nobody saw him for a week and finally he moved to another town."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rencie. "Did Mr. Beamer have a mean disposition that'd harbor up a thing for years and years?"

"Yes, he did, but I mustn't say that—poor man, he was killed in that Kirksville cyclone."

Rencie sank back, all hope of finding an old enemy gone. He was putting on his hat when Miss Pointer burst into sobs.

"I don't know what to do," she said, bringing a corner of her apron to her eyes. "My mind's in such an unsettled state that I don't know where I'm at. Just this morning Doctor Fordyce was around wanting me to sign up and let him have the lots in the Bellows Bottom—for his medicine factory, you know. He

says he's got options on all the rest and that I am holding back the development of the city by not letting him have them. Clem, he'd know what to do in a minute." She picked up the corner of her apron again and Rencie turned his eyes aside.

Half-way down the block Rencie suddenly came to a full stop with an idea. Where had he seen that hemisphere charm before? . . . On Doctor Fordyce! The idea made his head whirl, but he steadied in a moment and told himself that a detective must always be prepared for everything and suspect everybody until proved innocent.

"I suspicioned him from the very first time he put his arm around me and called me 'sonny,' " said Rencie, who could see through any guise of innocence. He had graduated from a correspondence detective course and was their agent for that county. He had a star to prove it. A gold star, too, that looked pretty well when you polished it with soap and water. The company was going to turn over all its cases in that neighborhood to him, and he was

a regularly licensed detective with a grade of ninety-seven per cent. in the final examinations. The company hadn't had any cases in his territory since he had graduated, but they might have any day. A queer thing about crime is that you can't tell when it's going to break out; there might be a perfect crime wave at any moment in his district, and of course he alone would get to handle all the cases.

Never suspecting that a licensed detective was watching his every movement, Doctor Fordyce went and came with freedom. Even had he known that his steps were being watched he could not have foretold the consequences. Many an hour he stood at his hotel window hoping to catch sight of a trim and sprightly figure coming down the street. It was not until after several days of waiting that he got to speak to Mary Mendenhall.

"Why do you keep me away so effectually?" he asked.

She did not look toward him. He kept pace at her side for a block.

"*He* didn't care anything for you, and here

you are with tears still in your eyes for him, when he never gave you a second thought."

Mary Mendenhall turned to him, her eyes flashing. "I never said that he cared for me, and I don't see what difference it makes to you if he did. He was a good noble man, and that's more than can be said for some people."

The doctor laughed as he opened the gate of her front yard. "That's the quickest way in the world to find out what's going on in a woman's heart—just prod up the fellow that she's thinking about."

"Doctor Fordyce, I have a headache and I am going in. I shall bid you good evening."

"A headache's as good as any other excuse. And this is the way you treat me after all I have done for you. Why is it you treat me this way?"

He came close to her, and resting one knee in the porch swing, looked into her eyes. He was master of all the little artifices that win.

"Because I know too much about you, and because I don't like you—that's why." Her

head went up splendidly and her eyes fastened on him unwaveringly.

"Yes, but I love you, Mary." His voice dropped pleadingly, and in it was every art of the trained reader. "That makes up for everything. When that comes all else goes. You hate me on account of my past; you do not see the new man budding in me. I have been short in the past, but I have repented bitterly. I am a new man all over. I must say it again, Mary, simply, plainly, as all great and wonderful things should be said. I love you."

"It is not love. It is fascination. You are a man of pursuit only. Possession to you is loss of interest. I don't believe that a true emotion ever touched your heart."

Doctor Fordyce bent over her. "Mary, there is one thing I wish to say to you." He spoke slowly as if thinking several sentences ahead. "You are going to love me. It is just and right that you should. It was so intended. Now that he is gone your mind will settle down and you will see the earnest-

ness of my appeal. Love can't go long unanswered."

Doctor Fordyce was laying his plans well. His psychology took into consideration that greatest of factors in making a rebellious heart say "yes"—that of environment. He knew that with her interest gone—Clem—she would seek another. Her work could not be all. By being thrown with her he would come to interest her gradually. Each day the fight against him would be less and less hearty—his faults would be ironed out by his virtues, which he would bring to her attention from day to day. Fordyce was planning well.

Standing upright, his arms across his breast, he looked down on her conqueringly. He knew that even the position of his body counted; that his calm command of himself was his fulcrum. He knew that woman must be conquered; that she would surrender. He began slowly:

"I have something more to say to you. It is not in defense of myself, but I am saying

it as a friend—a very dear friend—to warn you. It is about Pointer. I hate to say it—if there were any other way in the world, I would not—but I could have killed him myself. Don't look at me that way—you don't know what I do. He has been talking about you. When he was with other men he made little remarks about you that often maddened me. You know what those things are—little nothings—things that one can hardly put a finger on, but things that eat deep through subtle suggestion. But there, I mustn't say anything against him—now that he is gone."

Fordyce had unerringly taken the quickest way to rid a woman's heart of love by making her believe that her idol was speaking of her lightly and unfaithfully.

Mary's hands went slowly up to her bosom, and she bit her lips, while her eyes were fixed and staring.

Fordyce saw his opportunity. "You know that I love you, love you only as a big hearty, healthy man could. Now may I ask you just

one thing—if he doesn't come back soon, will you give me another chance, that we may be friends?"

She kept her eyes on the ground for a moment. Her hands trembled slightly, and something near a smile flashed across Fordyce's face. Her eyes came up to his with more light and trust in them than they had ever shown before.

"Yes," she answered softly, "if he doesn't come back—"

"—Soon?"

"Yes, soon."

The two sat in the swinging seat and Clara, the maid, brought out refreshments. Then they talked. Fordyce was in high mood and soon Clara heard her mistress laughing.

CHAPTER IX

SHORTCAKE

THE clown was leaning against the scuffed chariot half asleep when Clem came up.

"I'd think you'd be in there watching what was going on," said Clem, hitching a heel over the hub.

The clown's lips parted, but the kindest heart couldn't call it a smile. "I've been watching it for twenty years. They tried to educate me to be a priest, and now I'm driving the dunce cart. I hope you aren't starting in with us."

"Yes," returned Clem proudly, "just joined. The beds ain't much to speak of, are they?—but there's lots of excitement. I wish the cook'd strain the coffee."

"Last week we didn't have any coffee and the week before the cook was drunk. We hardly ever get them both the same week."

The music inside the tent rolled higher and higher, hung silent an awful moment and came down with a crash.

"Red Weaver's doing the triple somersault," announced the clown. "His brother missed the net last year in Topeka."

"Did it hurt him?"

"No," returned the painted man grimly. "He never knew what happened. All the old bunch's gone. Minnie Turpin, who used to be shot out of the mouth of the cannon—La Diavola—had a heart as big as a blanket, but the cannon exploded."

The clown tapped the ground with his long misshapen toe and looked out across the railroad to a corn-field rolling over the hill before the wind, its white tassels beckoning with myriad hands.

"I've got a brother that's a doctor," said the clown, as if picking up a loose sentence out of his thoughts, "and he's got six children. One of them is named after me, and I sent him a goat Christmas."

Clem waited until the clown's attention came

back from across the waving fields. "I'd like to ask you something, mister, if you don't mind." The clown raised his brows in interest. "What is shortcake—that's what they called me."

The merrymaker smiled slowly, weighing whether or not he should answer. "It's a term the boys have," deciding that it was for the best, "that means easy money. It's a lamb that hasn't yet been to the shearers."

"Well, they won't get anything from me," said Clem. "You can't get tallow from a gnat."

The clown smiled but offered no word. Clem fell into thought for a time, then said, "I ain't seen a circus in twenty years without paying. I guess they ain't so good any more."

The misshapen shoe was still. The clown came to his feet—humorously if it had been inside the tent—his shoe sticking out in front, like a boy standing in the tops of his boots, only it wasn't humorous. The laggard light was still in his eyes, and the white hands still beckoned over the hill.

"Sure they are. Follow Captain Scully with the seals, dodge under the seats and go over to the band section. They'll find room for you there. Only don't let the colonel see you."

Clem slipped inside and in a minute had found a seat as the clown had directed. Forgot was all the outside world; how could the lady in spangles hold on by just teeth, swinging from the bar that way? And the tramp in the ragged clothes turned out to be the best performer after all. Clem had hardly straightened his knees and taken a long breath before the crowd filed out.

Clem paused before a painting on a wide flung canvas of Archibald, the Human Pincushion. Archibald, according to his pictured likeness, was a care-free individual in spite of the fact that he was a repository for all kinds of pins, nails, files, scissors and sword blades. They were sticking through the loose skin of his throat, in the web of his forefinger and thumb, and through the back of his neck, with

a few scattering hatpins in his legs. Above this tangle of cutlery towered Archibald, a sweet, almost innocent smile on his face, seemingly unconscious of the fact that in his abstraction somebody had put all this hardware on him. Above all, shining over all, even triumphing over the blunt and sturdy hatpin in the back of his neck, was his smile. His was a strong clear-cut face with the exception that recent rain had slightly discolored his jaw and had washed one ear down on his bulging evening dress. But these little things didn't make any difference to Archibald; he was out to have a good time, and didn't mind the wind or weather.

The smile was laid on with such a heavy brush that in a moment Clem's face began to widen and his throat to itch just above the Adam's apple.

"That thing's got me doing it, too," said Clem aloud, straightening his face.

A hand dropped on his shoulder and refused to lift. Clem turned to look into the

face of a large portly individual with a tobacco-stained goatee. It was the colonel, to whom all the gamblers paid their dues.

"Come with me," he said, sliding his hand down Clem's arm and at the same time sidling through the crowd. Out through the eddy of people milling around the side-show tent, into open space and out behind a tent and stake wagon.

The man folded his arms across an abdomen that looked as if it had been put there for that special purpose. He gazed at Clem sadly for a minute without saying a word. Then his stained goatee began to twitch.

"You are accused of a very grave offense," he said sadly. "I hate to be the one to tell you of it."

"What is it?" asked Clem quickly.

The portly individual bit his under lip and his face winced, braving himself for the ordeal. "You are accused," he said with heavy huskiness, "of stealing fifteen dollars from Mr. Hagan, an old and valued member of the circus. I hope it's not true."

"Of course it's not," returned Clem. "Who said so?"

"Mr. Hagan himself has made complaint to headquarters. I am not aware of all the details and I should not give you any information, but I understand that Mr. Hagan affirms that he gave you three five-dollar bills with which you were to do all in your power to assist him in his work, but that instead you received this money or moneys and disappeared. I trust this is not true, Mr.—"

"—Pointer. I didn't steal it—here it is—take it."

"Then you still have it on your person. That complicates matters more than ever," finished the other gravely.

"But I went into the show for just a minute."

"Mr. Hagan has been looking for you all afternoon and the officials have been unable to locate you. They are watching all outbound trains."

"What can I do?" Clem appealed.

The gentleman of girth shook his head sad-

ly and reached for his meditative goatee. "Let's hunt up Mr. Hagan and see if we can prevail upon him to show some leniency. We'll hope for the best, anyway. Be cheerful, Mr. Pointer—there's always hope," finished the portly gentleman sadly.

Mr. Hagan was found easily. Surprisingly so.

"He didn't get clear away then," exclaimed Brassy, rushing up and addressing the captor. "That's lucky. Are the papers ready?"

"I didn't steal that money," put in Clem, "I was at the show all the time."

Brassy looked at Clem coldly for fully a minute before he spoke. "You're pretty clever; you fooled me. I'm sorry you turned out yellow. I was willing to share up with you because you looked the part and you could rope the rubes, but you had the streak."

"It tain't honest, that's what it ain't."

Brassy fastened him with a superior smile. "Who're you to talk about honesty?"

"Well, I am anyway, and it tain't right to take their money away from them that way.

I didn't know your racket at first or I wouldn't bit."

"Don't you worry about gettin' their kale," said Brassy, his tongue loosening. "I am a profound believer in that masterly bit of philosophy which runs to the effect that there's one born every minute, and in wet years the average runnin' up close to two. They come out to the circus once a year with money in their jeans, by jooks! and if they don't get a thrill over a table they'll go out and hit it up over a bar. Once a year ain't often to iron the ruts out their brains. They think about it all summer, and dream about it till the frost's out. If we don't get the green somebody else will. Put that down under Useful Information. You never saw me take a red off a souse; no children go to bed hungry on my trail. I tell 'em in my patter that they can't always guess it and that the table's going to win every time it can. A lot of these codgers we take it off of go home in automobiles and what's your make? They ain't going to miss it—they all got socks under the fireplace.

Now come on, old sport, fit in and we'll clean up. While the main top's going we'll line up the wise Willies—every town's full of human *Brittanicas* that you can't tell anything—and give them their first lesson in meekness. I'm clean out of paper cigar lighters. Help me out to-night and we'll call it square."

Clem hesitated: after all Brassy was human and maybe he was right about its not pinching any of them.

"Just to-night and we'll reform. What say?" Brassy held out his hand and Clem's went limply into it. "We'll clean up to-night and shake it. I've been thinkin' about going back home to selling hog cholera remedies again for some time anyway. Trailing a circus is a dog's life. But let's clean good and hard this last time before we quit."

Clem reluctantly agreed and as soon as the gasoline torches were going had his table spread. Clem, better coached, drifted among the men and boys, dropping a good word whenever he could and coming up every few minutes with a five-dollar bill that always

brought back a mate. As Brassy handed him over the companion bill he gave a prodigious wink, all the time crying out:

"See what's on the tree for this gentleman. He didn't move a muscle and the five's his. What he can do everybody can do. Two can play as well as one."

Clem noticed a dry-faced man with his hand in his coat pocket studying him between two narrow slits. He was just about to worm up to the table when the dry-faced man stepped over to him, and cocked an eye to one side.

"He don't seem to be losing any," he said in a high wavering voice, nodding his head toward Brassy.

"Sometimes he does," returned Clem professionally, showing the tips of a handful of bills. "Depends on your luck."

The dry-faced man cocked the eye still farther to one side until it shot up over Clem, but was at the same time able to get his expression.

"'Pears to me that you be winnin' right well."

"No reason to kick. Now's a good time to get in while there ain't such a jam."

The man with his hand in his pocket studied the weather gravely a moment, then swung his eye, like a great search-light around to Clem. "Yes, you seem to be winnin' remarkable well. Fact is some of the boys allowed they see you get off the circus train this mornin'."

A hot blast burst over Clem, and red rushed to his face. He must warn Brassy. Worming up behind him Clem touched Brassy's elbow and jerked his head toward the dark circle that kept trying to smother out the gasoline torches.

Brassy drew down his brows in anger but Clem gave a more vigorous nod toward the night circle. Bitterly Brassy dropped the shells into his pocket and folded up his table. A thin dry hand dropped on his shoulder and a thin dry face appeared out of the darkness.

"Might I trouble you for jest a moment? Have you any objection to showin' the law your license for conductin', runnin' or over-

seein' games of chance, hazards or lotteries in Henry County, State of Missouri?"

Brassy faced the thin man and carefully tucked away the bills. By the time the last bill was out of sight he was his voluble self. "Certainly not, my good friend. Always glad to accommodate. Can't we retire for a few moments and talk this over in private?"

"If you hain't got it the discussion won't last very long."

"Certainly not, certainly not. I wouldn't take up your time for anything. It's such a hot evening, couldn't we go into the drug store and get a little something to liven the inner man before we go into details?"

"Business before pleasure," cut in the high voice. Turning suddenly he laid a hand on Clem and drew the two into the office of the livery stable and closed the door. Throwing back his coat he showed his star. It was a big sterling silver one with engraving on it. The officer tapped it proudly. "I guess you know what that means."

Brassy began running through his pockets for the pretended license while the officer, his hands folded across his breast, looked coldly on. "By jooks!" said Brassy at last. "I guess I was thinking about the last place we played. I told the twenty-four-hour man to be sure to get a license here as I didn't want the good citizens of Henry County to feel that I wasn't giving them a square deal. He's clear forgot that, he has, and I'm going to give him a piece of my mind, I am, for I know how it makes you people of Harrison feel." Brassy was master of himself again. "Do you know I always like Harrison. Fine city. I've often thought I'd like to bring my wife and family here and settle down in a little vine-clad cottage with a silky haired cat curled up asleep on the front porch. It's surprising how well known Harrison is: from one end of the state to the other. It's the first city they ask about—Harrison is. It don't seem more than yesterday when I used to go along here and the engine wouldn't think to whistle till it got almost past. I remember one day the manager

of the circus and I was sittin' in our private car and was passing here when he said something that I nearly split myself laughing over. Jim could always say the splittingest things! Poor man, he's gone to his reward now. Well, Jim says, 'When there's a freight train backed up on the siding here you can't see Harrison at all!' Wasn't that good? Don't seem more 'an last week and now look at Harrison—a reg'lar metropolis and known from one end of the state to the other!"

The officer's arms slipped down and the stiffness dropped out of his back. "Yes, I guess that's right."

"Sure it is. And lots of people out of the state asking about it. Do you happen to have any property you'd like to sell—a house with vines on it and a cat on the front porch?"

The constable walked over and sat down on a soap-box. "No, I hain't, but my brother-in-law has a fine place with a south front and a young orchard. It don't take vines no time to grow."

"No, it don't," said Brassy reflectively. "I

suppose if I put 'em in right away they'd be up by next season. Has he got any honeysuckle?"

"A whole clump of it." The officer was enthusiastic. "It was my brother-in-law's wife's favorite flower. She used always pour the wash water on it—suds and all—and it growed like a sunflower."

"Do the children stop in on the way home from school and pop 'em on their foreheads?"

"Every night—the yard's jes' full of 'em all poppin' away hard as they can and laughin' fit to hurt themselves."

"And do the hummin'-birds come and get in 'em, their wings churning up the yellow blossoms till they look like egg-beaters?"

"Yes, jes' as quick as the children get away the hummin'-birds flock up and—"

The catch on the door rattled and a high brown straw hat, perched on a mound of beard, appeared. Washed-out blue eyes winked and in came a long black alpaca coat. "I see you got 'em, Gib. Bring 'em right over to my office and we'll get it over with." It was the judge.

The constable arose and wound his hands together as though he was screwing up his courage. "I been talkin' to 'em, Jedge, and I ain't so sure they air guilty."

"I saw them with my own eyes, Gib—guilty as sheep-killin' dogs. Bring them up to my office, and we'll make an example of 'em."

Slowly and with marked hesitation the constable followed the judge with his two prisoners up a narrow flight of tobacco-spattered stairs. Judge Goodpasture lowered himself into his swivel chair and motioned the two accused to a wooden bench against the wall.

Judge Goodpasture dipped his pen, glanced at the calendar and scratched a word. Then he scoured the rusty point on his thumb and dipped again.

"The court of Justice Goodpasture, Division 7, Henry County, State of Missouri, is now in session. What are they guilty of, Gib?"

"I ain't so sure they air guilty, Jedge. They seem to have lost their license, and I believe I'd go kinda easy on 'em, Jedge."

"No license was taken out, and besides

I've heard that before. What's your name?"

"Mr. John Simpson Hagan."

"We can get along without the Mister," reproved the judge. "Any occupation?"

"Traveling salesman."

"What's your name and business?" turning to Clem.

"Clement Pointer and I used to be in the grocery business."

"Better stuck to it. Was you two men playing, takin' part in or participatin' in game or games of chance in Henry County, State of Missouri?"

"It's this way, Your Honor," explained Brassy in his most confidential and persuasive manner; "at the solicitation of several of the boys I was prevailed upon, very much against my wish, to demonstrate the blind spot in the eye by placing some small object, part or parcel under three walnut shells, shifting them quickly to see who in the crowd could guess which particular shell sheltered the object of their search. It's a most interesting experiment, showing that the hand is quicker than

Mr. Constable, the prisoners are yours

the eye. The light rays falling upon the optic axis, or as it is commonly called, the pupil of the eye, filter gradually through, losing some of their intensity thereby, until they come to the corona, or as we say, the iris, where some more of them are lost, so that by the time they pass through the anterior scleroid and fall upon the brain they are so weak and diminished that blind spots show through. Thus by shifting small objects, say the size of walnuts, one of them gets in the blind spot and fools a person in knowing what movements it has passed through. Science has studied the human eye for a thousand years and still it doesn't understand it. A child can ask questions about it to baffle the greatest sage of all times. Did you ever stop to think, Judge, about the wonders of the human body? Do you even know where your eyebrows come from? Did you ever stop to realize and to cogitate upon the wonderful mechanism of the human foot?"

Judge Goodpasture rapped on the table with his corncob pipe. "Hold up there," he warned,

putting up a slow and deliberate hand. "You'd been better off if you'd done more cogitating on the gambling laws of the State of Missouri and less on the wonders of the human foot. Did you or did you not conduct, carry on or participate in games of chance?"

"You see, it was this way, Judge—"

"Gib, did you see 'em?"

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly.

"The court saw 'em with his own eyes, too. You two men are herewith and hereby fined one hundred dollars and sentenced to six days in jail. Let the record be spread on the books. How much money have they got, Gib?"

Brassy's cheeks puffed up and a coating of red settled over his face. His knuckles resting on the table trembled. "This is outrageous," he roared. "It's—"

The judicial hand went up like a semaphore. "One more like that and it'll be ten dollars for contempt of court. Did you ever stop to realize and to cogitate upon a judge's authority? How much coin or currency do you find upon their person or persons, Mr. Constable?"

Gib was bent double over a pile of bills, peeling them back with glistening thumb, bending lower and lower as the count grew higher. "Stamps don't count, do they?" he asked without looking up.

"Are they stuck together?"

"Yes."

"No."

"I find, Your Honor, they have one hundred four dollars and thirty cents."

The pen kicked and sputtered across the page. Then it was stuck into a scarred and ink-spattered potato. "Mr. Constable, I command these prisoners of the law into your custody and order the same to jail for six days. I find the expenses are four dollars and thirty cents. Mr. Constable, the prisoners are yours. The court stands adjourned."

Gathering its beard into its hand, catching it up as though putting a ribbon around a lace curtain, the court leaned over and the cuspidor splashed. Fitting on the brown straw rick Judge Goodpasture lowered himself down the steps and into the night.

CHAPTER X

THE WORLD BECKONS

CLEM was strolling through hedge lanes, piled with flowers, blue boats scudding across the sky and yellow-breasted larks climbing up the clouds and scooting down to the music of the morning wind in the thistles, when a heavy chain rattled and an iron door clanked.

"Here's your pork and beans," came a voice from neither above nor below.

Slowly things came jarring back to reality. An unfeeling sharp-cornered brick was steadily eating its way through Clem's shoulder blades. Clem roused and threw back the quilts; a double of the blanket had become turned under.

A round face fitted itself into the iron checker-board of Clem's door. "Up and make

merry—the larks have been on the wing this hour."

Clem propped himself on one elbow and scowled. "Where are we?"

"Café de Goodpasture, Henry County, State of Missouri, guilty of playing, taking part and participating in game or games of chance."

Clem put his hand to his head as if to brush it all away.

"Can you sleep here—on that junk heap?"

"Like a log. You can't expect Looie de Quincy beds in these tank towns. This is like the bridal suite at the Waldorf Astoria to the last place they got me. There was things in my bed that wasn't paying guests, and they just gloated over a nice fat stranger. They took to me right at once and the next morning I looked like the bottom pole of a rail fence your grandfather laid. In the circus business you can't always expect a bower of roses and a slave to fan you to sleep with peacock feathers."

From a tin pan in the corner, Clem splashed some water over his face, studied the towel

and finally chose his sleeve. "Ain't there anything we can do?"

"Sure there is," answered Brassy joyously. "Make the best of it. Did I ever tell you about the time I got pinched in Lebanon and they started to lynch a nigger one night and the nigger got out and how they thought I helped him duck and came at me with a dirty rope? Yes, everything has its drawbacks."

The breakfast was waiting in the chuck-hole.

"I hope they got a checker-board," said Brassy, bending over a plate of beans. "Gets lonesome toward the end of the week if you ain't anything to do except build air castles. It don't take long for a fellow to look at the pictures on the walls. Wasn't the jedge a case? An' when he spit you could hear the river wash. If I'd had a minute more I'd got him with that line of bull. I wonder what a fellow can see out the window here—the Boston Racket Store or the carving yard of the Universal Tombstone and Casket Company —prices plainly marked. I hope you don't snore."

Clem caressed his shoulder. "Not on these racks."

A chain rattled, a hinge screaked and the constable stood before them. "Good mornin', Mr. Hagan," and a nod to Clem finished the saluation. "I hope you slept well; I'll try to get another quilt for you as I guess these are gettin' kind of thin mebbe along in the mornin'. Have you thought any more about the matter we was discussin' last evenin', Mr. Hagan?"

"What was that?" asked Brassy, puzzled.

"About the vines crawlin' up the porch and the cat asleep in the sun. I used my influence with Jedge Goodpasture or it might 'a' been—"

"Yes," snapped Brassy, "but since my stay here I have observed drawbacks to this city that I had never noticed before. The climatic conditions are not all what I had hoped for and my eagerness for cats has somewhat abated since yours kept me awake so last night, springing on perfectly harmless mice that couldn't possibly scale an iron wall and gulping them down whole. Last night while I was listening

to the city feline crushing the bones of one of those innocent creatures I couldn't help thinking about how much work it is to keep up a full-grown honeysuckle bush. And what if one of those humming-birds should dart at me and stick me in the eye with its needle bill? Just one peck and my eyesight'd be gone—ruined forever—and I'd be a poor blind man being led around on the street by a dog. No, Mr. Constable, my enthusiasm has abated since our talk last evening and I would have to consider long and seriously before investing in property in this hamlet. Have you any light summer reading that would serve to get a person's mind off last night's fatalities?"

The constable disappeared to return in a few moments with a blue almanac, the cover of which showed a man who had undergone a major abdominal operation and whose physicians had suddenly retired without dressing the wound.

"Oh, horrors," exclaimed Brassy, pushing back the weather book, "if this is light sum-

mer reading please don't bring on your tragedies! Who is this Mr. Zodiac? And what are all these crabs and scorpions crawling up on the poor wounded man? I never in my life saw a man with his contents so shamelessly displayed, nor did I ever see such a care-free expression on the face of an individual as Mr. Aries T. Zodiac has on his. The hardened creature actually seems to delight in his dishabille, not giving a whoop whether there are any ladies around or not. He has the flaps turned back as if inviting the world to come up and make merry, while the doctors have stepped into the workroom to get a sponge and a wrench. His face gives me the jimjams: there is a far-away look on it as if he was trying to figure out just how long it would take a freight train, loaded with cantaloupes, running a mile a minute night and day, year in year out, Fourth of Julys and holidays, starting on the earth to make it to the sun, barring accidents, while he'd a lot better be putting on his clothes.

"My poor nerves are unstrung with them crunched bones ringing in my ears all night and the first thing I see this morning, is a man all cut up with a lot of wriggly things slowly but surely closing in on him. Ain't you something cheerful like *Simon Legree?*"

The constable backed out like a crab. "Here's the *Harrison Headlight.* It's just off the press —kind of smelly yet."

Brassy shook the paper open and ran his eye down a column. "Just listen to this," he exclaimed. " 'Newt Duffy, a prominent agriculturist of Polk Township, brought in a fine load of hogs one day last week.' Can't you just see him settin' on the wagon seat, reaching over now and then to put on the brake, with a leather vest on, greasy as a smoke-house floor, riding to town as proud as a Lord Chamberlain while his poor wife's at home slaving away? He routs her out long before daylight and makes her fry him some mush and heat up the hominy and he goes gaily to town, gets the money on the hogs the boys

raised, buys the best five-cent cigar in the Square Deal Grocery Store, gets his name in the paper and goes home without getting his wife even a calendar, and then jumps on her for making him eat side-meat all summer. Can't you just see the kind of a man this Mr. Duffy is? He cusses the boys out of bed before you can see the hen-house, sends them out to do the milking and the chores while he leans back in the rocker, and reads about himself in the paper, raising the best hogs in Polk Township and hell with his fam'ly. His wife calls him 'Newton' and he says, 'Hey, there!' and when one of the boys hitches up and takes his mother to town Saturday she has to ask her husband for a dollar to get a new dress, and she's give him the egg money to buy spring calves. I'm glad that I, a gentleman with an honorable calling and ideals, am not forced to reside in a community so overrun with things —I will not dignify them with the name of men— like this Newt Duffy. If I had known this kind of people was around Harrison we

wouldn't had such a long and useless discussion about honeysuckles last—"

Brassy's face sobered; the rest of his sentence ran off into a mumble. The constable backed out of the room. Brassy's eyes slowly traveled down the column, then he folded the paper and put it in his inside pocket. He studied a dancing girl, chalked on the wall, standing on one foot, then turned to Clem:

"Would you mind letting me see your left hand a moment?"

Clem held it out.

Brassy gave one glance at it and then turned to study the kicking creature for a moment.

"You never told me why you left Curryville, did you?"

Clem's face ran red, to give up in a moment to a ghastly white. Finally his voice came out in a thin thread: "I just got tired of never seeing anybody new and not knowing anything about the world. And every place except back there things are happenin'."

Brassy turned open the paper to a head-line and pointed:

MURDER IN CURRYVILLE, MO.

C. L. Pointer Disappeared—Hounds on the Trail—$500.00 for Return of Body Dead or Alive.

Smaller type heralded the details with more or less accuracy, with the preponderance of evidence in favor of less, outlining motives and counter-motives for the crime, containing the description of C. L. Pointer and closing with the whet that next week's paper would give fuller and more horrible details.

Brassy pointed to the line describing the mole on the inside of the missing man's thumb. "That's why I asked to see your hand," he said simply.

Clem weakley settled down on the soap-box.

"Do you know you are worth five hundred dollars?" asked Brassy suddenly.

Clem covered his face with his hands.

"Five hundred dollars is a lot of money," said Brassy slowly; "dead or alive."

Clem lifted his head quickly. He started to

rise but dropped back. "You ain't goin' to—to—"

"Yes, I am. I'm going to get you out of here so that you can go back by yourself."

Clem sprang up. "What do you mean?" he said.

"This," returned Brassy, pointing to a comb swinging to the wall by a sickly brass chain.

Clem put his hand to his thin locks and shook his head dumbly.

"Don't you see it's steel lined?"

"Yes, I guess I do."

"Pull out the teeth and it's a fine saw. Saw one of them bars in two, twist it over and we can slide out slick as sausage. I'll work the saw and when you hear the chain rattle, sing or have a hemorrhage."

Brassy braced himself on the soap-box and the saw began to gnaw its way through the bar. Turn about they worked, hastily soaping over the iron wound when the door rattled. When the comb was gone, Brassy tore off the comb-rack on the tin mirror, flattened it under his heel and sawed steadily on. Clem, with

Clem set up a song whenever a footstep sounded outside

his ear to the iron door, set up a song whenever a footstep sounded outside.

"Don't you believe," asked Clem after supper the second day, "that the constable'll think we are enjoyin' our imprisonment too much, and suspect something?"

"Him?" returned Brassy contemptuously. "He hain't suspected anything since the grasshoppers."

When the shadows crept in filling the cells with blocks of black, the constable came in, held up a knee, perching on the other leg like a faded flamingo and ripped a match down his thigh. A line of light leaped along his leg, but as the point of fire in his fingers grew into a blaze the line died away. Balancing on the soap-box he held up the curling match and the oil lamp clinging to the wall shouldered the illuminative responsibility.

"Speaking of light," the officer put in, "Harrison is one of the best lit cities you can find anywhere. It's a great convenience where you have women-folks and children in the family. Have you any children, Mr. Hagan?"

"Yes, one, but by jooks! as long as I stay in out of the sun and business goes on the same as usual at the old belfry, I'll never bring her to this civic blot on Missouri's map of pride. I hain't seen her now for years and it's my fault, too," he added bitterly. "She's ashamed of her father and she left home because her mother still had a thread of hope left that I would turn out all right. She was the breath of the morning and had a hug as tender as a moonbeam in a cow track. When I was the supply man with the circus she would put her fat little arms around my neck and say, 'Pa-daddy'—that's what she always called me—'Pa-daddy, when I grow big can't I go with you and be the lady lion tamer? Then we can always be relation.' Innocent as a lamb on white clover, that's what she was. But when I got to shifting the shells and—and the rest of it—well, I hain't seen her since."

Brassy's voice trailed off into reflection, and Gib, awed by the change in his manner, backed out.

Brassy dreamed away for several minutes.

Even though the lamp cast a caricature of him on the floor, twisting his head into a startling resemblance to a bag of potatoes half slouched over, it wasn't funny; instead the softened lines made one's heart go out to him. "By jooks!" he mused, feeling for the tin saw under the mattress, "she would, too—she had nerve enough for anything."

Arising, he drew the soap-box up to the wall and went to work without a word. Back and forth he drew the wedge of tin, blowing the filings into the night. At last Brassy handed Clem the tin blade, and bracing his knee against the wall, gave the bar a tug. Slowly the bar bent, like a candle before the fire, and at last parted. Brassy twisted the spikes over, and turned around with radiant smile, the perspiration standing on his forehead.

"The world awaits," panted Brassy happily. "Why tarry here, Sir Galahad, when the world beckons without? No doubt Gib will miss us when we're gone, but such is the sadness of life—the best of friends must part."

"How do we know when we can get a

train?" asked Clem, hesitating before the final plunge.

"Easy, easy. Wilst kindly give your attention to this clipping torn from the scrivener's paper that Gib, the constable, gave me? In thirty-one minutes a passenger goes through—and the blind baggage often carries guests who were not escorted on by the porter with his footstool. We'll just have time to make it and how provoked Gib, the biceps of the law, will feel when he comes and finds that the jailbirds have flown! He might even be moved to 'Pshaw! pshaw!' twice in rapid succession, just like that." Brassy reached under the lining of his trousers, and unfastened a safety-pin. "Here's a couple of bills—it's my safe deposit when the bulls frisk me. You take one and I'll take one in case we get lost from each other. Now you for Curryville!"

Clem, with his back to the cell, fitted his elbows between the bars and dropped his head in thought. "All right," he said finally.

Brassy grew silent, so quiet that the shrink-

ing of the iron after the day's heat could be heard.

"I'm going home, too. Maybe I can go back in the hog medicine business."

Again Brassy was silent, the lamp throwing heavy lines on his face, giving him a touch of sadness that Clem had not believed possible before.

Brassy came out of the reverie with a long breath. "This ain't gettin' the quinine took. You first and wait for me out behind the hitch-racks. Here, on my shoulder! Feet first, my lord, feet first! When you get through the hole, hang by your fingers, face to the wall, but when you drop whirl so that you light back to the wall or you'll butt into the bricks. Don't mind the buttons! Be careful not to get your clothes hooked on a spike and watch—"

Brassy seized Clem by the ankle in a warning grip.

A step sounded on the hollow wooden floor outside. The chain rattled.

Brassy released his hand. "Jump!" he

whispered hoarsely. "He's on. Jump and run like hell—you'll just about make it."

"I ain't going without you," returned Clem.

"I got you into this—and I'm going to get you out. I'll hold him. Beat it!"

Clem's red and stained face disappeared into the black cut in the wall. His fingers held on to the brick ledge a moment, then he dropped into the night. A soft thud outside told the story.

The door complained on its hinges and a high voice sang out: "What you got that lamp goin' for?"

Shaking the iron cot as though just rolling out, Brassy stepped around the cage to the door and putting one sleepy arm over his head said, "I beg your pardon, but I didn't get the drift of your remark."

"What's that lamp lit for?"

"Oh, you mean that white beam on the wall! It is lit, ain't it? Careless of it to get that way. Do you have insomnia, too?"

"My daughter saw this light and I want

to know what's the matter," snapped the officer, pushing the door in Brassy's face.

"I shirk from telling you," replied Brassy easily. "I would fain not mention it to a sensitive man like yourself, but if you insist on knowing the bare bald truth I will have to harden my feelings and spit it out. We had to do it for self-protection. We retired early and were soon in the land of cotton when a great beast of prey came slipping out of the reeds and bulrushes, stood a moment with uplifted paw and then sprang into our midst. We leaped horrified to our feet—see, like this! It was the cat, striking down one of the innocent rodents gambolin' in the corner, springing on her like a dread demon, getting the poor mother by the neck and rending her limb from limb, bone from bone, snuffing out her life in the twinklin' of an eye. Then the foul fiend retired to the middle of the floor and slowly and disgustingly et the mother while the bereaved children stuck their noses out the holes and sobbed their hearts away. It was sicken-

ing. Unable to bear the lonesome wailing of the bereft children, we lit the lamp so that the poor little orphans wouldn't venture out and into the jaws of death. If you'll remove the heartless beast, Mr. Pointer and I'll be glad to dispense with the smoking wick."

"What was you lookin' out the window for?" demanded the constable.

"Trying to get my eyes off the horrible sight. The slaughter and sight of blood fascinated me. I would shut my eyes and try to turn them away, but slowly they would swing back to the ghastly scene, and to get them off the carnage I had to stand up and look out the window. Won't you please take that beast out?"

"What was them sounds I heard?" stepping inside, while his daughter dropped the bolt.

"Mr. Pointer and me weeping. Poor man, he'll never be the same again."

"Where is he?"

"He just couldn't stand it any longer," sobbed Brassy, drawing a hand across his eyes. "He had to leave."

"Got out?" cried the constable. "How?"

Stepping forward, the constable's eyes fell on the twisted bars.

"How long ago?"

"That's purty hard to tell. To me, without the presence of his company and locked up alone with that feline murderer, it seems like ages, but no doubt it's shorter. To Mr. Pointer, doubtlessly the time has flew by. Did you want to see him about anything particular?"

Rushing to the door the constable called to his daughter:

"Grace, Grace, telephone to the depot that one of the men has got out. Hurry!"

"Will you pardon me a moment, Mr. Constable, but the train has been gone just about two minutes. I guess mail'll be forwarded to him, though, if you wished to communicate with him."

The constable's dry face hardened and stiffened under his anger, freezing like a fresh hide in the snow. His lips broke straight across as though the hide had been twisted in the

winter weather. All his rage burst through the slit in one big snapping sentence:

"You're a skunk, that's what you are."

Brassy drew over nearer and when he spoke it was soothingly, an older man counseling a wayward youth:

"I fear me that you have spoken hastily, without weighing your words. Quick words have kept more people tossing on a midnight mattress than all the fever in the land. I know how a person whose tongue has taken the bit between its teeth has said things that he has repented with an ache in his heart that seemed to be tearing the vitals out of him. The tongue is an unruly member that must be handled with a mailed hand. When your tongue has been threshing at your teeth to get out and run amuck, have you ever tried the old, old plan of counting ten? Simple, almost childish as it seems, this plan has saved many a heartache. It stabs me through and through to think that you would even intimate that I had the slightest resemblance to that uncouth

member of the weasel family who, when crossed, makes himself so obnoxious and distasteful to everything and everybody around him. I feel sure that, when in a calmer moment, you reconsider your allegation, you will humbly repent your hasty words and be willing to bite your tongue out for letting it get the upper hand of you."

"Pa," came a girl's voice from the other side, "the train's gone."

"Probably Mr. Pointer left word with the station agent for you," said Brassy thoughtfully.

"Shet up!" snapped the arm of the law. "We'll telegraph ahead and get him. Anyway, I'll see that you don't get out."

His heels clicked spitefully, and an hour later when Brassy peeped out of the barred window the representative of peace and justice was propped in a chair, leaning back against a maple, a murderous-looking shotgun across his knees.

"Hey, there, Mr. Constable," called out

Brassy, framing his face between the bars, "don't point that thing this way—it might go off."

The officer raised the gun threateningly and the face in the frame disappeared like Punch in a marionette show.

The officer's head dropped back against the bole of the tree, and he was slowly settling himself to rest, when a wild, scratching, clawing, four-footed creature shot out of the window, dropped spitting into his lap, gathered its claws painfully in Gib's trousers and leaped away, snarling insult.

CHAPTER XI

HOME SWEET HOME

WHEN a freight train jarred into Curryville a couple of nights later, the cars crowding one another, surging forward and falling spitefully back, like cattle in the yards, no one saw a worn man with face much lined at the eyes lift the trap-door and crawl out of a car of baled hay. Lowering himself down the iron steps, he slipped behind a coal bunker and waited until a man with a long-billed cap had given the engine a drink and the cars began to creep forward, as if trying to slip up on a foe, the line of the station rising and falling as the cars rolled by.

While the two green lights were melting into the night, the man slipped across the tracks and started up-town, keeping to the side streets and the shadows. The McElravys

still had their washing out—why couldn't she ever get it done on Monday as a person should? Good-natured, though, every one of them, and Bob, who began by "sweeping out" and sticking to it with a smile every day in the year, would own the Owl Drug Store some day.

Oh, the Kipps were painting their house! The very house he'd planned and built. But that isn't the color for it; after all, there's no color like a dignified white. It was the doings of Bertha Kipp who'd been away to boarding-school. Bet she'll marry some scalawag from Kansas City who wears pearl buttons on his shoes and enlarges photographs. Bob McElravy was too good for her, he was. And he used to carry her books home from school and licked the stuffing out of that Rouse boy because he said she had red hair. What's getting into the young people nowadays?—they never know who's meant for them any more.

There's Mrs. Upshear sitting in the window writing like she always is, keeping a diary, thinking that her husband'll come back some day. Come back some day in spite of what

they all say, and she couldn't never remember everything to tell him, and maybe if he came back too late—sitting there with the shawl around her and everybody else fanning—he'd find the diary and understand. If the cherries weren't all gone he must send over a bucketful. She'd take them in her thin trembling hands, thank him soft like and look around the bare room for something to give him; then beg him to sit down and rest a while, and pinching her old faded skirt between her fingers, lead up to it so she could ask if he thought William would be back before the Yellow Grimes were all gone? You know it's fourteen years, just about now when the cherries are getting red. Do you suppose William'll think I'm much older? He wouldn't say so if he did—just spread his fingers out on my hair and kiss in between them. . . . . .

Nobody must see him until he got home and found Hulda. About this time of the evening she would be sprinkling down the clothes or sitting beside the red lamp on the yellow cracked table reading her good night

chapter. Nobody could keep house the way Hulda could; everything just like it had come out of a store. You could come to call any time you wanted to and she wouldn't have to run ahead shutting doors and throwing things under the bed like some women he could name. Every string from the store wound up on a corn-cob and stuck in a Mason jar so that you could go into the kitchen at midnight and put your hand on anything you wanted. And when you got sick one bowl of her broth made you feel like sitting up, and she could just look at you once and put her hand on your forehead, ask where you felt sick, march right out in the kitchen and come back with something that would straighten you out before a regular doctor got through shaking the thermometer.

Night was fast taking up the houses, like a great piece of blotting paper.

Clem was elated through and through to be back. Home had never before seemed so dear. Curryville was the best town in all the world, but they should fix the crossing down by the

stock-yards—some horse's liable to break a leg.

He came slipping in through the back gate. He would surprise Hulda just about the time she was shutting the Bible on the hand-worked book-mark. He must look his best; he knew that he was grimy after knocking around box-cars, but how could he brighten up before he went inside? The rain barrel suggested a way. The wash-pans were all in the house, but a crock would do. He plunged his face in and scrubbed and dried on a wadded handkerchief. He brushed the hay-heads off and shook his coat. He felt better anyway, even if his efforts did not show very much. The rain barrel was getting full of polliwogs; tipping it up on its chime he drained them out and backed away from the encroaching flood.

What a big nest the English sparrows had built in the eaves-trough while he had been away. English sparrows were the meanest birds in the world.

He turned the corner to step up on the porch and nearly fell over a yawning coal pail. Hulda hadn't had anybody to fill it for her, and she

was never very strong; not half so strong as she looked. He turned back to the wood-shed. The supply of coal was getting low; he would have the bin filled for the winter before the prices went up.

He came back with a heaping bucket brushing against his leg, one arm out for balance. He stopped short; the front part of the house was a blaze of light—every lamp in the house was burning. Slipping up to the half-open window he pressed his face against the screen. The room was full of people talking in low voices.

Then he saw that the light didn't come from lamps—but from candles.

In a moment the full significance of the candles and the crowd burst on him. They were having what would have been a wake had Hulda not been an American and a Methodist. They had given up search for his body and were mourning for him. Clem knew how it was; Hulda would feel better after there had been some public demonstration for her lost brother.

They had given up search and were mourning

Clem wet his lips—he would rush in and bring joy to all. But something made him pause a moment and put his ear to the screen.

"Poor man, he's better off where he is than the rest of us," came a sad voice. Clem stiffened: it was Mrs. Kiggins, and she was speaking in the mournful tone she used at funerals, and Mrs. Kiggins was one of the most regular funeral attendants in all Curryville. "Of course the taking was hard, but he has gone to his reward. We poor worms of the earth can not understand many things, but we know that everything is for the best. We mourn and sorrow for our dear departed brother when all the time he is in a far happier land, resting in the bosom of Abraham. Just a few nights before Brother Pointer's taking off I had a horrible dream—just like I did the week before the Kimmons girl got her foot caught in the frog on the railroad track. I seemed to be walking beside a great body of water, and it was lappin' on the edge and I saw a lonely figure walking ahead of me. Something about it looked familiar and I called to it, but it

didn't turn. Then I called again and it turned and it was—oh, oh—Brother Pointer—and his face was all bruised and bloody. He raised one hand like this and pointed down into the water and disappeared. Do you understand it, Brother Sadnow?"

The Reverend Sadnow drew his hands out of his sleeves, and cleared his throat. Such things could not be explained, but they were a matter of history and record and only went to show how uncertain human life was. The only safe way to be prepared for the call that must come to all was to attend meeting regularly and contribute freely that the great work of saving souls might go on undiminished.

"Held up one hand like this," Mrs. Kiggins repeated, "a sad look on his face, and pointed down into the water. I didn't tell anybody, for you know how it would worry a person. I'll never forget how he pointed—just like this. Poor man, he's better off now than we are. Maybe he's back this minute, lookin' at us and feelin' sad for us."

Clem stepped back into the darkness and tried to turn away, but was drawn irresistibly to the window.

"He was a good man," said Mrs. Ford, reaching over and righting one of the candles. "As good a man as ever walked on two legs. Kind of quiet, but when he talked you listened. I mind the time my cave got full of water and with Rencie too little to help and all the canned fruit Cousin Wilson gave me just ready to topple over and spoil. Then Clem come—just remembered I was a poor widow— and bailed all the water out and slipped away before I could get him a cracker and a mouthful of jam. The last time I saw him he was hitching up a boy's billy-goat."

Reverend Sadnow pushed his hands farther into his sleeves and prepared to speak.

"The departed brother was a worthy vessel; always ready to take his talent out of his napkin, share it with the world and give the linen to some worthy soul. His lamp was always trimmed and sitting in the window to keep some poor soul's weary feet from stumbling as

he trod the sidewalk of life. Healthy and happy one day and the next gone to the land that floweth with milk and honey. It only goes to show that in the midst of life we are in the midst of death. The angel of death has its black wings stretched out all the time and in its talons snatches us poor mortals away without a moment's warning. I should like to urge on all of you who have not handed in your church letters that you do so at once for no man knoweth what the morrow will bring forth."

Silence held for a labored minute while the Reverend Sadnow glanced around the room as if calculating which one would be the first to be snatched away.

The mourners moved in nearer the candles; a locust at the corner of the porch lifted its file-like voice in challenge to the sleeping world.

"He was a splendid character," said Mrs. Woodbridge simply. "I sometimes think we are so busy being selfish that we overlook the fine qualities in those nearest us."

"He was a tender noble brother," sobbed

Hulda. "It breaks my heart to think of all the mean things I said to him. He was going down-town that night for me, tired out and patient as he could be, when he was struck down, thinking of me to his last breath." Her handkerchief went to her eyes and her shoulders rose and fell in repentance.

Clem drew back from the window and tiptoed away. "And me runnin' away from it all! I ain't fit to associate with them, me a gambler and a jail criminal! I never did put that hinge on the gate she wanted me to, and she has to lift it every time she goes through, and me worrying the life out of her every day, and she keepin' the neatest and cleanest house in town." He sat down on a saw-horse under a cherry tree, and for half an hour he remained in the same position, his chin in his hand, thinking. Then he spoke aloud as if laying down the law to himself; spoke slowly and with the harshness of a Puritan. "I ain't fit to come back to her—me, a jail-bird! I'm going away and take my medicine and when I do come back I can look her in the

eye. I'm going to straighten up and come back a man."

Rising, he turned resolutely away. As he passed through the small garden he paused, and looked over the latch fence. "I hope them Knabb chickens ain't eatin' up all the tomatoes when there ain't no one here to watch 'em. She caught cold settin' them out while I was down-town arguin' how the world would come to an end."

At the corner of the yard he turned and looked back. The low tones of the organ rolled out—Gertie Knabb was playing, and voices were lifted in *When We Shall Meet Over on the Other Shore.* Brushing his hand across his eyes, Clem squared his shoulders and started toward the freight yards.

Suddenly a figure rose out of the darkness before him—Rick Oody. Clem jumped back, but it was too late—Rick had seen him.

"Who's that, who's that?" demanded Rick excitedly. "Go 'way from me, I ain't done nothin'—I swear I hain't. What makes you come back and pick on a poor old thing like

me?" He dropped his spade and was just turning in flight, when Clem reached out a hand.

"Is that you, Rick?"

"Yes, it's me. To-night when I was buryin' a cow I looked up and saw the new moon over my left shoulder and you come back to haunt me already."

"Don't be afraid, Rick," patting his shoulder. "I ain't a ghost."

"Who—what are you then?"

"I wasn't killed, Rick. I run away—like a coward."

"You sure you wasn't killed then," working his shoulder out from under the friendly hand.

"No, Rick, no, I'm all right. I'm just a fool, that's what I am, Rick."

Rick edged away as if not quite sure that the stranger wasn't something of a less elemental nature.

"I am goin' to tell you something, Rick, and I want you to keep it to yourself—for me. Will you?"

"Yes," he returned firmly.

"I believe you. I wasn't killed, not even hurt—that's all I can tell you now. I'm going away, but I'm coming back sometime and explain everything. I want you to promise that you won't mention a word of this to anybody—will you promise?"

Rick promised.

Clem patted Rick on the shoulder. Rick was getting old, but in spite of everything he was lovable and loyal.

"How's everybody, Rick? Have you had any more fires? Do they keep water in the priming bucket? Did Gertie Knabb win the *Tribune* piano? Have the McElravys found their goat yet?"

Rick was helpless under this whirl of questions. "No, no more fires—everybody's been too busy searching for your body. It's been found three times. Say, I hate Doctor Fordyce. They hadn't got out the reward offers till he was calling for a sale of your lots in the Bellows Bottom. Miss Mary Mendenhall hated him at first, too, but she's kind of givin' up now. One day she said to me, 'Do you

think Mr. Pointer is really dead?' 'I know it,' I said. 'Why?' 'Oh, nothin',' she says. 'He is a brave man, isn't he?' 'He was,' I says, and she put her handkerchief up to her eyes. Just then Doctor Fordyce come up and went walking with her. I hate him. Ever notice his ears?—growed tight up against his head like door hinges."

"Do—do they go walking together often?"

"He's got an automobile," replied Rick.

Clem caught his breath and involuntarily his hand went up to his head. But in the darkness Rick couldn't see. "I ain't good enough for her," he said under his breath, "for either of them . . . me a gambler . . . and a jail-bird. . . . There's nobody to blame but myself. I'm going to take my medicine." Then he raised his voice to Rick. "Now, Rick, don't say a word—promise me again, won't you?"

Rick held out a hand still rough with clay, and Clem knew the pledge would never be violated.

"Good-by, Rick."

With that Clem slipped off toward the station where a thirsty freight was panting at the tank.

CHAPTER XII

AN OBLIGING CONSTABLE

THE chain rattled, the door creaked and Gib entered the jail.

"Come right in and make yourself at home," greeted Brassy. "Out-of-town trade solicited, home cooking a specialty and buses meet all trains. Our interior decorations are by such well-known artists as Beefy Bill, Roscoe the Red and Jack the Penman. Our scenery is especially noteworthy, containing enchanting glimpses of the shingle roof of the New Palace Livery Barn, a vista of the rear of Weisenberg's New Cement Hand and Steam Laundry, with an especially good opportunity to study Huggins Gully, where they built the scaffold to hang Mexico Mike, the boy bandit. From this alcove maddening glimpses of the sunset may be obtained. I don't wish to push our

sunsets over rival sunsets, but I am sure you will find them especially attractive. Without wishing to run down any of our competitors or cast aspersion on their beauties I can say these sunsets are almost an exclusive feature with us. Guests have remained for weeks chained to the spot just to take advantage of our solar arrangements."

"Shut up," snorted the officer.

"There, there, you've forgotten your counting. Begin one—two—three. Do you know that I believe I am not welcome here; it hurts me to think you do not want me around; if I had known how you felt about it, far be it from me to have forced myself on you. A sensitive soul like me'd rather die than feel unwelcome, so I will leave day after to-morrow. By jooks! seems to me I've been here since the buffalo left."

"Can't you shut up? I'm gettin' afraid to come in here."

"One—two—three—"

After his tour of inspection, the officer slammed the iron door spitefully.

A little later the chains rattled again and the door groaned its way open.

Brassy looked up and Clem stood before him.

Brassy came to his feet, grabbed both of Clem's hands and pumped them. "Welcome to our salon," he exclaimed, hopping from one foot to the other in an elephantine dance. "Thrice welcome! Come right in and make yourself at home—the best in the place's yours. Things have changed a lot since you left: temperature and the sheets. Jooks! but you are looking younger—travel must do you good. Mr. Gib has missed you sadly; he's been asking about you every day. I never saw a person take such a fancy to a fellow the way he did to you; you hadn't been gone half an hour till he was wild to see you—perfectly wild."

Silently Brassy reached over and shook Clem's hand again. "Where did they get you, anyway?"

"They didn't get me."

"But you're here!" pointed out Brassy.

"I just came back—that's all."

Brassy searched Clem's face for the joke.

"Quit your kiddin'. Have they got hounds?"

"No. I came back."

"You mean brought."

Clem shook his head.

"Do you mean to tell me," flourished Brassy, "that you, in your right and lawful mind, deliberately, of your own accord, knowing full well what you were about, with malice aforethought, wilfully and premeditately returned to this chamber of horrors?"

"Yes. Are the beans any better?"

"You just came back, walked up to Gib and says, 'Please, sir, will you take me in? I am lonesome.' "

"Well, not just exactly that; I went up to him and said, 'I'm back and am goin' to stay my time out.' "

"This ain't no place for me. I'm afraid to stay in here alone with you. Say, I can't tell when you're kiddin'. Sure enough now, did you come back and say to Gib, 'Put me to bed, mother'?"

"Not just them words, but—"

"You shouldn't travel 'outside' with the circus—get under the main top. Say, old pal, I like you, anyway—even if there is something loose. You didn't engage permanent quarters, did you?"

"No, as soon as my time's up I'm going home and be white."

Brassy reached out a thick hand. "Shake. Me, too. But I'm going to stick here with you till your time's up."

It was useless for Clem to argue.

"I'm not going till you wring Gib's hand good-by," said Brassy. "I can learn a lot hangin' around you."

Long and earnestly the two talked, Brassy listening with deepest respect to Clem's simplest utterance, till the day came for Brassy to go. Gib came in and called: "John Simpson Hagan, John Simpson Hagan, be it known that your time of imprisonment has expired and I am ordered to give you your freedom."

"Mr. Officer," began Brassy, expanding, "I can not find words to express the emotion that stirs my heart, that wells up and clamors for

utterance at your thoughtful offer, but still at the same time a deeper feeling surges over me in remembrance of the many kind deeds you have done for me. When I came to this place I was a stranger and ye took me in and ye have sheltered and fed me ever since, stayed up at night and planned for me. Your hospitality has overwhelmed me, your generosity has shamed me. I can not bear to tear myself away and to think that our only means of communication'd be post-cards; at best there is something lacking in post-cards; they can not express all the emotions that the human heart is heir to, so I shall remain here for a few days more where I may have the pleasure of meeting you from time to time."

The constable rubbed his forehead, perplexed. "You mean you ain't goin'?"

"My soul cries for a few more sunsets—just a few more glimpses of the golden orb of day sinkin' to rest between the Boston Racket Store and the New Palace Livery Barn, its shimmering shafts falling athwart the Weisenberg New Cement Hand and Steam Laun-

dry and painting glorious pictures with its radiant rays in nature's own colors over the Bull Durham sign. I would stay on."

The constable backed toward the door. "I been constable for twenty-two years now, and never failed of election, but I ain't ever had any like you two. One breaks out, them comes back and begs to be locked up, and when the other one's time's up he talks about sunsets and won't leave. You ain't like the average run. How'd you gentlemen like to have cornbread to-night?"

"Oh, a golden piece of cornbread; split it in two and put in a piece of butter the size of a domino! We'll book solid with you!"

The constable could not do enough for them; no doubt they were philanthropists traveling in disguise or millionaires on a lark. You read about such things every day in the papers and if you treated them well, they'd come back and pension you for life. Or maybe they'd build an iron fountain for the city with a horse standing up—rampant was what they called it—and water squirting out its nostrils, and a

place down at the bottom for dogs. You could never tell. Besides the fat one didn't talk like an ordinary man; he must be a philanthropist or a millionaire.

Gib's whole manner changed. The old quilts were taken off and pillows were brought in; even a new wash basin appeared.

He came in with his hand behind his back. "Would you gentlemen like a bit of ice-cream?"

Brassy looked at Clem; Clem returned the gaze. Brassy spoke: "Cruel man, you but jest with us—jest with us poor miserable wretches incarcerated in this penal institution, so that we can not go about the land carrying on our great and good work of teaching doubting mankind that a blind spot grows on every retina. Now you taunt us—thrust a stick of candy in our faces and when our greedy fingers reach out for it, jerk it away with a harsh mocking laugh."

"It ain't candy—it's ice-cream," bringing his hand around and showing a heaping plate.

Brassy smacked his lips. "Pinch me, pinch

me—I sleep, but if this is sleeping turn back the alarm clock."

Gib's face cracked and broke open while he wormed backward toward the door. "If you gentlemen want anything more just pound on the chuck-hole and I'll hear you."

"I ain't wandering in my head, am I?" questioned Brassy, after the door had locked. "I feel all right, but still this is regular ice-cream."

As the days closed and the hours grew nearer for the two to go, the guardian of the calaboose became more and more thoughtful. The night before Clem was to have his freedom the constable came in and told them that although it was not quite according to the rules and regulations he would take them to the moving picture show, if they felt so disposed. But Brassy and Clem were talking over their plans after they should once get out and preferred the time to themselves. With a well of words Brassy explained that they were in prison and that none of the frivolities of the world should keep them from their stern duty

of being model prisoners and that while they appreciated his kind offer they felt that they had a higher duty to their state and country to perform by remaining in durance vile, and that they hoped he would see it from their point of view and understand just how much it hurt them to turn down his kind and thoughtful offer. After they got out and were riding in their private cars, looking into their smelting business in the West and running down to Florida to see how their reclamation of everglades was getting along, they should certainly remember his kind offer and when opportunity presented they would reciprocate in a way much more substantial than by mere empty words.

"They're in disguise all right," the constable whispered to his daughter Grace. "The fat one let it slip that they had private cars, yachts and everglades. Can't you spare a little of that salad, Grace?"

On the last day Gib came in and sadly informed them that freedom was theirs. "Can I help you gentlemen get ready?"

Brassy explained that in some way or other they would struggle along and try to manage to get their things packed without putting their host to so much trouble. When the two came out the hallway was half full of men who had casually dropped in to see the constable for a minute, nothing pressing, but just as well attend to it this morning as not. Cale Stark was studying the county map, his glasses teetering on the end of his nose. Lem Higginbottam was sitting in Gib's chair, his brown straw hat pushed back from a wrinkled brow.

When the free men came out there was a gradual shifting of all the loungers in the office until they faced the two philanthropists in disguise.

Lem Higginbottam rose from the office chair bedded with papers. "One of you gentlemen have a seat. Was you calculatin' on goin' back to the circus or was you thinking of investing in these parts?"

Brassy prepared himself. It was just the kind of situation he loved. He explained that he would catch up with his branch of the circus,

see that everything was all right, engage a new acrobatic troupe, send the earnings to the eastern safe deposit vault, cross over and see how the other branch was getting along, then start for the West in their private car and get some of the smelter business things straightened out. A person had to be constantly in touch with all the departments of a large business, his fingers on every key of the great machine to keep all the cogs working smoothly; such work could not be left to an assistant, or one of the minor officers, capable as he might be. Such work was for none but the president. But as for investing in these parts he had not had time to look around, busy as he had been during the last week; so busy that he hadn't gone out at all. Still if they knew of anything that had possibilities they could address him at his eastern office, 26 Broadway, New York, and if he couldn't come himself he would have his confidential man drop off on his way west. He'd like to go into it in detail but they must excuse him as

he and Mr. Pointer must catch the next train. Business was business.

Cale Stark had his phaeton outside and was going down toward the station and if the gentlemen wished to ride he would be only too pleased to have them jump in.

When they arrived at the station the platform was full of loungers, who had just happened to come down thinking there might be some express for them.

The train came rolling in, the engineer leaning out the cab, his arms folded under him, like a pup's feet, looking on the people in good-natured superiority. Engineers always have that look when they pull into a small town. They seem to be sorry for everybody on foot.

"There's the one that got away and came back," Clem heard some one on the edge of the crowd whisper. "Probably . . . in disguise . . . show them the new ice-house? Lots of . . . on larks."

The constable held out his hand to Clem. "I hope, Mr. Pointer, you won't hold this

rough fare against us—you know how the law's got to be obeyed. Being so honorable as to come back after you was out has sort of got us liking you. When do you think you'll be back to get better acquainted?"

Before Clem could tell him just when that pleasant day would be, the train started and Clem swung on. Where was Brassy? He hadn't seen him for several minutes. Clem hurried through the train and in the last car found him just coming in from the platform. "Barely made it," puffed Brassy. "Just barely. Running ain't my specialty. I got too much to carry, but I just had to stick till the very last second—the picking was so good." He pulled out a handful of bills and caressed them tenderly. "The boys got me off in the baggage room and inveigled me into showing them once more about the mysterious phenomenon of human nature—*la periphera,* or as it is commonly called, the blind spot. A goodly number of them had it and I was doing all I could—get that?—doing all I could and as fast as I could when the bell rang; I made

another examination or two, collected the fees and beat it. I'd like to go back there with a basket. We'll go snucks on this—half and half."

Clem pushed his part back. "No," said he firmly. "I can't take it; not a penny. I am starting out new, quick as I earn enough to buy a new suit and get fixed up respectable like I'm going home."

Brassy stared at him dully. "I don't get you."

"No, I'm not going to take it, much as I need it. I'm going to straighten up alone without it."

Brassy's eyelids opened and shut heavily. He started to speak, but ended by moistening his lips. Finally he burst out: "I'm beginning to wonder who I was locked up with; you make your getaway slick as lard, stay away three days then come back and say, 'Here I am—lock me up again, please.' When Providence puts some cash into your hands you push it back and say, 'Not a penny. I'm going to straighten up alone.' I can't see what

you've got to straighten up alone from. Come on, we'll go hep on this."

"No," returned Clem. "I've already started in."

Brassy wheedled him, played with him, tried to drive him to the acceptance of the money, but Clem was firm.

Across the aisle a woman was trying to hush a baby against her breast, but it would not silence. At the continued crying the passengers frowned and began to cast significant glances. There were tears in the woman's eyes which she wiped away with the back of her hand without pretending to use a handkerchief; red rough hands they were, too. Reaching into a worn frayed bag, she brought out a striped rubber ball; only there weren't many stripes left on it; just splotches where the stripes had been.

"Pretty ball!" she mumbled to the child. "Nice pretty ball!"

The child's face drew up; it gave one cry and then held its breath. The train rocked and roared while the child's face grew tighter

and tighter. Then it gave way in one wild scream.

A fat traveling man, with his tooth-brush sticking out of his waistcoat pocket, rose, dragged his sample cases off the rack, glowered at the mother and moved to the other end of the car.

Brassy turned so that he faced the woman and child. "What you going to do in Kansas City?" he asked Clem, his eyes across the aisles.

"I don't know; anything I can till I get enough money to go home and be respectable."

Both dropped into silence. The baby began to fret in the unmistakable manner of a sick child. The splotched shapeless handful of rubber fell to the floor, and bouncing limply, rolled under a seat. Brassy was down on his knees and after it like a terrier. He put the ball into the woman's knotted hands and wiggled a fat finger at the child. Slowly the child's hand went out and seized upon the fat finger. Brassy wrinkled his nose like a rabbit and hid his face behind a hairy hand. Sud-

denly he barked like a dog and the child cooed in glee.

Clem could not keep his eyes off Brassy. There was a softness and kindness in his face that he had never seen there before. The woman began to talk, hesitatingly at first, then gathering confidence, frankly. Clem withdrew into another coach for an hour and when he came back Brassy was sitting hunched down in the plush, his hands heaped over his rotund stomach. The baby was stretched out in a seat asleep, under its head a pillow; the mother sat opposite, her eyes on her child and in her face the light of new hope.

Brassy was strangely silent, sometimes studying the woman's face, sometimes his gaze bent on Clem. Clem had never known him so quiet or so thoughtful; he marveled at the change.

At last Brassy roused himself. "I get off at the junction. I'm going home—if my wife'll have me back. My daughter left when I turned bad, but my wife has never given up hoping. It's queer about wives, ain't it? I'm going to

sell hog remedies and while it ain't very exciting it's honest and nothing to be ashamed of."

When the train stopped at the junction Brassy fitted his hand into Clem's. "Keep your eye on that woman and kid—I gave them everything I cleaned up this morning. The little thing looks an awful lot like the lion tamer did when she was its size."

The hands closed again and Brassy dropped off the step. The station slipped away into the night and a switch-light that had been standing sentinel beside the track turned and fled after it.

CHAPTER XIII

GETTING A JOB

UNSTOOPED by bag or baggage, Clem wandered up the streets of the city alone. It was not his world; everybody was in a hurry, and nobody said good morning.

A janitor in a sweater was standing on a rickety ladder, the top resting against the glass of a window, washing and whistling away. It was a wonder that the window didn't cave in and send him sprawling through it, cutting him all to gracious.

"Hadn't you better go a bit careful?"

"Used to it. Never had a fall in my life. Where you from?"

How did he know that Clem didn't live in the city? And when he was there so early in the morning?

"From Curryville."

The man in the sweater shook his head, and brought the rubber comber down in a long sweep, the water flowing in front of it like a mild river. "Where's that?"

"Nodaway County."

The man shook his head again.

"Do you know where I can get a rooming house to live?"

The janitor finished another river. "Right around the corner—if you want beans instead of style. Not much on dog but the beans is regular. Used to live there myself."

Clem eyed the man as if to give him a parting warning, then turned the corner.

There was the sign in all the colors of the spectrum, some of the letters thin and perpendicular, others fat and wavering. The largest letters shouted:

HOTEL COMFORT

while another string of the same species, but patently not of the same family, made it known that beds were thirty-five cents a night,

while good beds might be obtained for fifty cents. Clem turned into Hotel Comfort.

Backed across a corner out of the way was the registering desk. Behind the desk a row of empty key boxes opened hungry mouths. On the wall William J. Bryan, our Peerless Leader, in three colors and an autograph, lurched heavily to his right as if trying to discover if there was anything in the boxes. To his right a farmer in high top boots, stood at the corner of a plowed "land," a sombrero on his head and a hand on his hip, watching his thirteen-year-old son driving a four-color harvester around a golden brown wheat field. The title of the picture was, "A Boy Can Drive It as Well as a Man."

Clem came clear up to the desk before he saw any representative of Beds 35c—Good beds 50c. She was bending over a book, one ear in her hand, her tousled hair falling free. Clem put his elbows on the desk and cleared his throat. Evidently his grace was just touching his lips to the tips of her ladyship's long graceful fingers. Clem kicked his toe

against the desk, but the duke, overcome by his emotions, had clasped Lady Lewellyn in his strong arms and was kissing her tear-stained face time after time, scarce knowing what he was doing.

"Can I get board here for a while?" he asked at last, ashamed to shatter the world of romance by such an every-day sordid thing as board.

The tousled head raised, a finger was fitted where the kisses fell thickest and the book closed on it.

"Was you speaking?" asked the girl.

"Can I get board here for a while?"

"Meals?"

"Yes."

"Bed?"

"Yes."

With the finger still imprisoned the girl reached under the counter, but the object of her search was not forthcoming. "Tookie," she called, "where's the day book?"

"In the readin' room," came back a voice from the kitchen.

The girl stepped into a side room and was back in a moment with a frayed ledger, full of red cross lines, that was never meant to contain names. Clem untangled the pencil tied to the register and poised it over the page. He hesitated a moment, then wrote: "J. H. Craig, Chicago, Ill."

The girl whirled the book around and studied the signature. Clem trembled and turned his flushed face away; she had seen through him. "I visited there last summer," said the tousled one. "My aunt she's got an automobile and you can't get in her house till you ring two bells. Where 'bouts do you live?"

A hot flush ran over Clem. "You mean when I'm home?" fighting for time.

"Yes—in Chicago."

"Oh, you mean when—when I'm home in Chicago."

"'Course."

"In—in the western part. The street's paved. What time is breakfast ready?"

"Six to seven-thirty. Tookie, show this gentleman to 17 and get a clean towel as you go

up." Dropping down behind the counter, she flopped open the book and fitted an ear into her hand. His grace now had a chance to come to a realization of what he was doing to the tear-stained face.

When the door was pushed open Clem felt a distinct shock. What would Hulda say if she could see that room? A little weather-stained window with panes no larger than your hand let in a filter of light to expose the naked bareness of the four walls. A thin scuffed carpet lay here and there on the floor with a large gap in front of the bureau. The aperture in the carpet looked as if, in shame, it had tried to crawl under the bureau, but hadn't quite succeeded. Ragged eyes stared out of the wall-paper where furniture had been shifted with more speed than care. In the corner opposite stood a wash-stand, leaning weakly against the wall for support; the basin was half full of dirty water. A fragment of elusive soap had slipped down to the floor. Three beds jammed end to end stood at bay, like wild creatures in a cave.

Wouldn't Hulda make things fly if she could get in that room for an hour? You wouldn't know it. Nobody in Curryville could touch her when it came to keeping things slick and shining; everybody said so, and he wouldn't be afraid to put her up against the whole state.

Clem picked up the soap, between forefinger and thumb, drawing the corner of his mouth into a shiver, and dropped the coated cake out of sight behind the wash bowl.

"Is this a thirty-five cent room?"

"Un-hun," grunted Tookie, reaching into his mouth and scratching a layer of sticky candy off his teeth.

"What are the 'Good Rooms 50c' like?"

"Two beds." The last of the layer was off and Tookie rolled it with satisfaction on his tongue.

Clem mentally calculated: this room was probably only a third worse and that was a clear saving of fifteen cents a day.

Tookie understood the hesitancy. He pulled his teeth apart with a *plop*: "But I hain't got the keys—they're down-stairs."

Tookie swung on the door-knob, pushing back his red hair with his free hand. "I came purty near making some money out of this room once," he said suddenly without connection. "A lot of it."

It was plain what Tookie wanted. Clem was thinking and it was half a minute before he brought himself around to ask, "How was that?"

"Sidna Allen slept here one night," declared Tookie, then chewed a moment before finishing, "and there was a reward on his head all the time. I didn't know who it was till a week later, but I seen him and talked to him. I kind of suspicioned it might 'a' been him the quick way he could move his hands—draw a gun quicker'n a wink—like that!—only quicker. He didn't say much, but his eyes could just look a hole through you. You know, I'm going to be a policeman. A policeman gets to carry a gun all the time. I got an uncle that is a policeman and he has an ivory handled gun. But that don't make 'em shoot any straighter. One time he was cleaning it and it went off and

shot a hole in the baby buggy." Tookie reached in with thumb and forefinger and pulled the candy loose from his teeth. Then he added as an afterthought, and as if it was too bad that things had turned out that way. "But the baby wasn't in it."

Tookie had a listener and that was all he wanted. His mind leaped from subject to subject with startling rapidity. "A policeman can save lots of money because they get to ride on street-cars free of charge. Once there was a man killed in here—had his throat cut. The blood leaked clear through the floor. You can see the marks on the ceiling in the room below yet—want to go down and see it? He had the bed you're sleeping in now. He was about your size, too. If you want your clothes pressed I'll take them down for you."

Clem smiled bitterly—he was glad that he even had clothes to wear. Clem sat down on the bed—leaked clear through the floor, he could not help remembering—to think for a moment.

"Drinkin' water at the end of the hall," said Tookie. Then the door closed and Clem was alone.

Many things had happened since the night he had started to the Owl Drug Store, after the sleeping powders. He had suffered much and evidently the end was not yet; had suffered much on account of his foolishness; suffered because he wanted to be a hero and because he had not appreciated his home—the nicest cleanest home in all the world.

To-day was Tuesday, and about this time in the morning Hulda would be baking and probably this minute she was scraping the dough-board. Then she would go over it with a damp rag and put it out on the shelf to sun. Mrs. Kiggins would run over for a minute with a couple of roasting-ears. How Hulda could fix corn on the cob. She never left any of the silk on the way Mrs. Knabb did.

What was Miss Mendenhall doing? Was she sitting at the window on the second floor, writing? Had she ever thought of him since

he left? Of course she hadn't. She was so far above him—but he just couldn't help thinking of her.

What had he got out of it all? The answer —nothing. But he couldn't go back until he had earned enough money to buy some clothes and a railroad ticket, so that Hulda would not be ashamed. He was further away from being a hero than ever before. He would have enough to live down coming back as respectably as he could.

This wouldn't get him anywhere and every minute was valuable and every minute in a city costs money. He hurried down-stairs and was passing through the front office when some one called out, "Key!"

The girl with the tousled head had risen and was resting her elbows on the counter, one finger on the duke who had drawn his glittering blade and was ready to defend the poor unfortunate Lady Lewellyn with his very life.

"Leave your key," she said without raising her eyes.

Clem dropped his key on the counter and

left his grace to fight it out alone. He wandered out into the street, uncertain which way to go, where to turn, looking for work. Pedestrians hurried by, always gazing at something away on ahead and never quite catching up with it.

A bulletin-board stood straddled on the sidewalk at the foot of a stairway. According to signs chalked in three colors on its black surface the whole world was needing help; was crying for it and couldn't possibly get along more than a few hours more without an army of recruits. Carpenters, bricklayers and paperhangers were in special demand, while cabinet makers, butlers and copper workers were urged to come in and do what they could to stem the tide of demand.

Clem went up the wooden steps and stood before a large woman with paper cuffs and a pencil in her hair. "What's y'r line?" she demanded, reaching for the pencil anchored in the marcels.

Clem hesitated. At Curryville he was captain and chief of the fire department, caretaker

of the Methodist church, owned lots in the Bellows Bottom, had been secretary of the Poland China Association for two years and had carried rural mail, but when this question was thrust at him he realized suddenly and sadly that he didn't have any line.

"I'm good at general all-round work," he said hesitatingly.

"But what's y'r line?" the large woman demanded, as if saying, "Another of them thickheads. Ain't we had a lot of 'em to-day?"

"I guess it's the fire department."

"Y' have to take an examination and wait for an appointment in that," the large woman explained wearily, rotating the paper cuffs. "If you enroll with us it's five dollars and ten per cent. the first month."

Clem did not have the money to enroll.

"I guess I'll just look around a little by myself," he said, turning toward the stairs.

The woman rattled her cuffs and smiled with a large air of superiority. "Come back when you want to go to work," she called, scratching her head with the pencil.

People seemed in more of a hurry than before and whatever it was they were looking at was farther away than ever.

A bell rang and wheels jarred and rattled. A woman screamed and somebody jerked Clem off his feet. "Look alive, man!" exclaimed a voice in his ear. "Keep your wits about you or you'll be ground into mincemeat. That car just barely missed you."

The conductor came running back, note-book in hand, to ask if he had been hurt, and when he found that he wasn't, he grumbled something as if disappointed and turned back to his car. The crowd thinned and Clem picked his way up the street, watching nervously on all sides.

He had only gone a block when he stopped short with an idea. But how could he go about carrying it out? A city is such a hard place in which to get around. Waving a passing car, he got on and paid his fare. The conductor was young and had a kindly face. Clem started to speak to him twice before mustering his courage.

"Where does a fellow get a job being conductor?"

The street-car man ran his eye over him. "You don't want to be a con. It's a dog's life, take it from me. Y' hear what that woman said to me back there? Going to report me because the car started with a jerk and bumped her elbow. Stick to your old job whatever it is."

"I hain't got any job."

"Well, if you just must have a car go up to the barn, room 121, and get your specifications taken. Stick on here and I'll transfer you over."

Clem hurried to room 121. Around it was a railing and behind the counter a man to ask questions. After Clem had answered the questions on the long sheet of paper, he stood up against the wall and the man balanced a ruler on his head and marked down his height.

"How soon can I go to work?" asked Clem.

The man explained that he would be put in the school and a breaker-in sent out with him. Much would depend on the report of the

breaker-in. Of course he had to furnish his own uniform, which would cost twelve dollars, and probably in a week he could be given a run, then at the end of the week he would get his salary. Take this slip and report this afternoon for measuring.

Clem folded the slip and went out. "You have to be a capitalist before you can become a street-car conductor," said Clem grimly, and tore up the slip.

He kept on the same side of the street; crossing the car tracks was dangerous. You could never tell when you were going to be ground into mincemeat.

At last he found a park seat and pushed back into its luxury.

Getting a foothold in the city was harder than he had ever imagined. If you were not trained to do one thing there was no place for you; cogs only were wanted. It would be much easier to go back to Curryville and slip in the back way, without word of explanation, but Clem squared his jaw at the temptation and said more determinedly than ever that he

would not go back until he could appear unashamed.

A newspaper flapped against his feet. He picked it up and ran his eye idly down the column. It was opened on the Help Wanted page. It seemed that everybody in the city needed help, and yet he was a round peg. People to sell things were most in demand. He found that if he knew the paint and color trade, had had exceptionally wide experience, understood retailing, was able to sell a first-class article at a fair price to jobbers and consumers, was a convincing talker, even though not what you might call fluent, could put up a natty appearance, had a pleasing personality and an agreeable manner and could bring with him some customers he could get twelve dollars a week from Bibstein & Brother, third floor. Clem decided that since his experience had been entirely local and since he was not up on retailing and would not know a jobber from a consumer if he met him on the street, and that since he was handicapped by not having the slightest idea what the paint and color

trade was, he would not accept the stipend offered by Bibstein & Brother, third floor.

The advertisements started off all right, but somewhere in them he always found a setback. The Ideal Corrugated Box-Board Company simply must have an assistant general manager at once. They had been looking around for the right man for some time, but a live wire had not been found. The assistant general manager must be honest, upright and a hustler. That was all that was required of him. Previous experience wasn't necessary, but if the applicant had had experience all the better; still if you were honest and willing to hustle you might overcome the slight drawback of lack of familiarity with the corrugated box-board business. Clem straightened up with interest. It was true that he had never before heard of the corrugated box-board business, but he was certainly honest, upright and would hustle from morning till night, and with such qualifications in his favor it wouldn't take him long to pick up the business. Then the last line caught his attention: "To such a man we

will pay a small salary from the first, providing he will put $3,000 into the business. Exceptional opportunity for the right man."

Clem sank back and his face dropped. No doubt it was an exceptional opportunity, but smiling grimly he decided not to apply. Opportunity would have to knock unheeded.

He was crumpling up the paper to toss it aside when another advertisement caught his eye: "WANTED—Man to demonstrate patent fire-escape belts; they make escape from a burning building easy. Exceptional opportunity for the right man—The Railey Fire-Escape Belt Company,—Surety Trust Building."

Clem read it carefully again. That was along his line and who should be better fitted to demonstrate a fire belt than himself—a fire chief? The idea interested him and aroused his enthusiasm. But there was one thing about it he didn't like: he had begun to be wary of "an exceptional opportunity for the right man."

He ragged out the clipping and hurried to the address given. Stuffed in the corner of

one of the upper halls was the room, cowering there as if ready to put on a belt and leap out the window. A tall man with a long coat and a sad air rose to meet him.

"Are you the right man looking for an exceptional opportunity?" he asked sadly.

"Yes," admitted Clem.

The sad man waved him to a chair and studied him for a minute. "Do you realize," he asked with the sorrow of the world in his voice, "that fire destroys more lives each year than any other agent in the world outside of sickness? Hundreds are hanged, thousands go down in the ocean, but tens of thousands are swept off this earth each year by the most horrible death known—fire. Perhaps you have had some loved one snatched out of your arms into the jaws of this terrible monster; perhaps you have had a brother, sister or sweetheart perish just beyond your finger-tips for the lack of a safety belt. It was given to me to do something for the world; the gift came in the form of an invention—the Railey Fire-Escape—and now I am selling this marvelous de-

vice for a startlingly low sum that other people may not have wives and daughters and sweethearts perish before their eyes. When man mastered fire he rose above the animals; but fire has always been a surly servant and still strikes back, cruelly, relentlessly. There is only one escape from it—the Railey Belt. You are acquainted with the workings of this marvelous mechanism, no doubt?" his voice rising sadly.

Clem shook his head, while Mr. Railey lifted a surprised brow.

Mr. Railey rose, spread the skirts of his coat and drew down a canvas belt with a heavy buckle.

"This is the gift that came to me in a dream. I saw it all in a flash, arose and drew the plans for it before I lay down again. Oh, if you could see the countless letters I have here from people all over the world—have you got that one, Minnie, from Tasmania, where the brother said it saved his whole family?—thanking me from the depths of his heart for his own life and the lives of his loved ones. I

studied for the ministry, but saving people from burning office buildings, factories, homes, houses and hotels is just as noble as saving them from the lake of everlasting fire. See how easily it is adjusted."

Seizing Clem by the shoulder he pivoted him on his heel and swung the belt around his waist.

"There, it's on. Strong as a cable and light as a feather. Unhook this bottle of fire liquid, break it and it gives you, in crawling toward the window, hydrogen to live on and keeps the smoke and flames out of your lungs until you can get to the open air. Then throw this hook around the head of the bed, or fasten it to the casing of the window and slide down this thin steel wire to safety, regulating your speed with this lever control. A grandfather is safe and a child can operate it. Here, let me show you. I hook it under the casing, now crawl out that window and see how easily it works!"

Mr. Railey in his enthusiasm was pushing Clem toward the open window.

"I see how it works—perfectly," insisted

Clem. "Besides it makes me dizzy to hang out."

Mr. Railey put the belt away a bit sadly, showing plainly by his manner that he was disappointed that Clem had not demonstrated its wonderful life-saving qualities.

"Adjusted in six seconds and will support three people," said Mr. Railey, as if quoting from a circular. "May be kept in a desk or under a bookcase and if hung on the wall makes an attractive ornament. Can not burn or drop when you are half-way down; no cork to become rotten; can be adjusted with one hand while holding a loved one in the other. The only belt on the market where two or more can escape from the devouring flames at the same time. A complete diagram explaining its adjustment and uses accompanies each belt. You may not need it to-morrow, but sometime you will; sooner or later your life may depend on the Railey Fire-Escape Belt. Special rates for orders of more than a dozen. Now Mr.—"

"Craig—"

"—Mr. Craig, do you think you would like

to come in and be one of our great organization for dispensing this useful device among the people of this city? It is a worthy cause, an occupation in which you can lift up your head, for the lives of some of these very people may hang on you."

Clem glanced around as if trying to discover the great organization for dispensing the useful device.

"We have our agents in every state and territory. This morning at eight o'clock representatives went out in every large city in the land, including Cuba and Canada, to bear to the unthinking people of this world the message of the Railey Fire-Escape Belt—that you owe it to your loved ones to protect yourself. Selling the Railey Fire-Escape Belt is a broadening occupation; in it you meet the best and most capable men in the business world. You sit down after making a sale and chat with them about business and the affairs of the world." He lifted up a hand as if to forestall any interrogation. "Not if you tell them that they owe it to their loved ones."

"How much wages is there?" asked Clem, thinking more about himself than the peril of his loved ones.

"Ah, there is where we are different," exclaimed the great benefactor and inventor. "We teach you an occupation and actually pay you while being taught. You get forty per cent. on every sale made, which leaves only sixty per cent. to me for inventing and manufacturing the belt." Mr. Railey sighed and dropped his voice until a person could see that money was the last thing he was thinking of so long as the Railey Fire-Escape Belt was carried to the loved ones.

"This booklet, *What to Say to a Prospective Customer,* is a course in salesmanship. It tells how to prepare the mind of the prospective customer, how to fasten his attention, how to meet and overcome his objections, how to be affable, when to be firm, and how to clench the sale. It contains valuable pointers on how to carry on an entertaining conversation, how to dress and how to deport yourself as a gentleman. I have dozens of let-

ters—where is that one, Minnie, from the man in New Zealand?—saying that this book, with the training one gets in meeting the world, is equal to a college education. All the time you are working at this you may know that you are doing something that the Good Book commanded you to do, for does not Jude, brother of James, say, 'And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire?' Every time you sell a Railey Fire-Escape Belt you may know that you have pulled some one out of the fire. In a quiet unassuming way you are a hero."

Clem straightened up; he hadn't thought of it in just that light before. Hypnotized by the flowing words of the inventor he was saying, before he realized it, that he would accept the place and that he would take *What to Say to a Prospective Customer* home with him, study it and be around in the morning to go out and get his college training.

Selling the famous belt was hard work—even after he had mastered "What to Say," and committed the answers to the questions. People did have a way of asking questions

that were not in the book. Clem tramped from office building to office building, trying to prove to the poor benighted workers that their loved ones were not sufficiently protected by the outside iron fire-escapes, demonstrating that the Railey Fire Belt could be adjusted with one hand, that it would support three people with perfect safety and that hanging on the wall it was an ornament to any office, home, house or hotel.

Slowly his money accumulated and in his trampings he had seen in a shop-window just the suit of clothes he wanted. Hulda always liked blue with a white stripe. He would buy a genuine Panama, too, with the genuineness stamped in the leather lining and he would get one of those traveling-bags that buckled away over on the side.

He came into his hotel tired and worn. The boy was still driving the four-color harvester around the golden brown wheat field and William J. Bryan, our Peerless Leader, kept his gaze unwaveringly on the key box.

Clem dropped on his bed where the man

had had his throat cut, and was just slipping into a doze when there was a knock.

"Brought you a clean towel," said Tookie, entering.

Instead of throwing it over the top of the little wash-stand, Tookie handed it to Clem.

"You got blue eyes, hain't you?" fired Tookie suddenly.

"Yes, I guess so. Why?"

"Nothin'. Do you believe that after a person has committed a crime they like to come back and hang around the place where the heinous deed was committed?"

"I don't know," returned Clem wearily, leaning back against the wall.

"That's what it says in the papers about criminals. I always read about mysterious murders—a policeman's got to do it. A policeman gets to eat bananas and peaches off a pedler's cart free of charge.

"I'm always on the lookout for the fellow to come back that cut that man's throat in your bed. The blood leaked clear through the floor. You can't never get blood stains out. I

could trade for an automatic revolver if I wanted to. Mine's a six-cylinder, but you have to pull for every barrel. You're about five feet, ten, ain't you?"

Clem shifted his knees uneasily and admitted that he was.

"There's another fatal fascination, too. They want to carry something around to remind them of the murder. Sometimes it's a collar button, sometimes it's a lock of hair and sometimes it's a newspaper clippin' describin' how the heinous deed was committed. If you want anything, go out to the button in the hall and ring."

Tookie pulled the door behind him; Clem dropped back on his elbow. Things were stirring in his head. What did the boy mean? He felt in his pocket and caught his breath. Carefully he ran through old letters, clippings and scraps of paper, crumpled and soiled. He had lost the clipping about the mysterious murder that Brassy had found in the Harrison paper, with a description of himself and an announcement of the reward!

A knuckle rattled on the door and Tookie's high voice called out: "Mr. Pointer— Mr. Pointer—"

"Yes," answered Clem quickly, then gasped with an audible intake of breath.

"Telephone call." Tookie's head appeared inside the door. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Craig. Your room mate hasn't got back yet, has he? If he comes up-stairs without anybody seeing him will you tell him there was a call for him? Don't be afraid to ring if you need me—Mr. Craig."

When the door closed Clem found himself breathing hard. He was discovered. The bitterness of it forced itself in on him. He was trying to earn a few honest dollars so that he could go back home and now they were ready to swoop down on him for the reward, alive or dead. He could rush to Curryville ahead of them except that he didn't have the money for car fare and he wouldn't go back until he could return with high head.

One thing certain, he must escape at once.

Gathering his hat he crept down the stairs

as quietly as he could, pausing on every landing and listening. From the last landing he could see the tousled head still bending over the distressed lady. A step at a time he edged down the last flight and turned into the bathroom. From here he reconnoitered a moment, then tiptoed toward the side door.

A figure came in the side door, looming ahead of him.

"Upon my blazing soul," exclaimed the man, rushing at him with extended hands. "By jooks! the goldfish need a bath if it ain't my old college chum of the calaboose, Clem Pointer!"

It was Brassy.

Clem drew back, working his fingers nervously, and felt for the wall as if for support. "Hist!" sounded Clem, clapping a finger to his lips.

Brassy felt for Clem's hand and pumped it vigorously. "Beat my grandmother with a broom handle, but I'm glad to see you! Ain't it luck, both of us coming here to the Waldorf Astoria together!"

Before Clem could edge in a word a voice sounded behind him. "Move at the peril of your life!" It was Tookie, and in his hand was a six-cylinder revolver that had to be pulled for every barrel.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THIRD DEGREE

SLOWLY Tookie crept up on Clem until the barrel was within a few inches of his face. "So, my man, you were trying to slip out, was you?" asked Tookie in the tones that the papers quoted policemen as using on such occasions. "You would try to trick me, try to foil the law, would you? C. L. Pointer, you will pay the penalty. Move and I'll send this bullet crushing through your craven skull. Move at peril of your life."

"Say," exclaimed Brassy, "be careful of that thing—it might go off!"

Tookie rolled the weapon till it hung halfway between the two. "Who are you to interfere with the law? Perhaps you are an accomplice of this desperate outlaw on whose head a reward is set. Ah, perhaps I have

come upon a den! Up against the wall, both of you; hands up! The first that moves is a dead man."

Clem fitted his shoulders to the wall.

"By jooks!" broke in Brassy. "Of course this is none of my party, but may I make bold enough to inquire what all this is about?"

"Against the wall, my man!" commanded Tookie in his deepest tones.

Brassy squared his shoulders against the wall and reluctantly raised his hands.

"Kind sir," pleaded Brassy, "would you mind giving me some of the details? This is kind of sudden, you know. If you want to frisk me let me put down my mitts and I'll do all I can to help the cause along. If you can get anything out of my pockets you'll be putting one over on yours truly. Do you work this section regularly?"

"I'm a representative of the law," exclaimed Tookie, "and there is a reward for this man, dead or alive. Like all criminals he carried something to remind him of it. I found the clipping this morning that told all about it."

A light of understanding ran through Brassy's mind. "Oh, I see. You're holding this gentleman up and were going to take him back and I happened along and you stuck me up for good measure."

"Wasn't you talking with him?"

"Sure, I was. Oh, say, bo, that's one on you!" an idea leaping into Brassy's mind. "You got my man. I have been shadowing him for two weeks. I flushed him first at Harrison and have been on his trail ever since. I hadn't closed up on him, as I wanted to see if he had an accomplice in this city. Now, ain't it a coincidence—you sticking up my man?"

Tookie's gun began to sag. "Are you a detective?" he asked, his eyes widening.

"Just look at that!" putting his tongue in his left cheek.

"What does that mean?"

"It's the sign—so detectives'll know one another. When it's in a dark room and where they can't see one another they do it by touch —I'll show you."

Tookie lowered his weapon hesitatingly and

extended an unarmed hand. Brassy turned his back to Clem so that he could not see the sign and pressed the tips of two fingers on the back of Tookie's hand. "What part of the law do you represent?" asked Brassy.

"Well, I ain't really any of it yet, but I am studying to be a policeman. Policemen make lots of money and get to ride on street-cars free of charge."

Brassy's face became serious and he tapped his forehead with a finger, turning some grave problem over. "Have you got a license for carrying that?" asked Brassy, nodding toward the sagging revolver.

Tookie shook his head, coloring deeply.

Brassy bit his lips thoughtfully, and beckoned the young officer of the law to step into the bathroom. The two stepped inside, while Clem sat down wondering what Brassy was up to. When the two came back Tookie's six-cylinder agent of destruction, that had to be pulled for every barrel, was out of sight. Tookie's eyes followed Brassy eagerly and admiringly.

"I can see now how your eyes bore right through people," breathed Tookie. "How many people have you killed, Mr. Pinkerton?"

"Oh, I don't know," returned Brassy with modesty. "Never a single one unless I just had to. There's generally some way of getting around it. The best sleuths don't do it—unless they're driven to it."

"I saw them taking finger-marks once. Do you think I would make a good policeman?"

Brassy turned his boring eyes upon Tookie. They ran up and down Tookie, taking in the smallest detail of his dress, analyzing his face, feature by feature. They took in the width between his eyes, the thickness of his thumb—everything. Then Brassy asked an anxious question:

"Can you remember faces?"

"Yes," answered Tookie quickly. "I can see a man once and I'd know him if I didn't see him again for forty years."

"Are you afraid to go out alone at night?"

"No, I ain't afraid at all. Nothing scares

me. Once there was a man murdered here and the blood soaked clear through the floor. I wasn't afraid to look at it. Would you like to come up and see where it soaked through?"

Brassy thought that he could get along without this choice experience, as he had seen so much gore spilled that it had sort of lost its attraction for him. However, he appreciated his friend's thoughtfulness in mentioning it and his kindness in offering to show it.

"You seem to have every qualification necessary," said Brassy thoughtfully, "to become a well-known policeman. But there is one very important thing that I have not asked you. Much depends on your answer. This is it: Can you keep a secret? If the chief of police tells you that a gang is planning a bank robbery, for instance, and details you to keep your eye open for suspicious characters hanging around the bank before the deed is committed, could you keep all that a secret until after everything was over?"

"Yes, sir," returned Tookie eagerly. "You

could not get a word out of me if I was told not to tell. In school I wouldn't ever tell the teacher anything."

Brassy's face lit up hopefully, every feature showing satisfaction that Tookie had come through the grilling test satisfactorily. "Well, I am goin' to try you out. If you pull through this you ought to make a lieutenant. A lieutenant gets to go to the shows free of charge, you know. It's lots better to be a lieutenant of police. Now I'm goin' to put you to the test. If you keep this secret successfully I'll recommend you myself." Brassy paused and looked at Tookie for a long moment, then asked impressively, "Do you know what it means to be recommended by me?"

Tookie jerked his head back and forth at prospect of the great honor.

"Here is a secret for you to keep. Don't say a word about me catchin' this man for a week—a week from to-night—five forty-six. I don't want the public to know about it until the blotter has been made out. You understand about the blotter, don't you?"

"Yes," hesitated Tookie, hating to admit that a person so well qualified for police work should not know all about the blotter, and why he should not breathe a word about it to any living human for a week.

Brassy made an excuse to go behind the budding lieutenant and gave Clem a giant wink.

"Now, I will take my catch down to quarters, and put him in the third-degree room for a while. Glad to know you—see you to-morrow."

Tookie thrilled to the touch of two fingertips on the back of his hand, and stood with his nose pressed against the screen as prisoner and detective walked off down the street.

"Gee!" he breathed, "think of getting into all the shows, too."

"Pinch me, pinch me!" exclaimed Brassy, as soon as they were out of hearing. "At first you didn't recognize Mr. Hagan, late of the Harrison calaboose, in the role of William J. Burns, did you? Little did you dream when we first met in the side-door Pullman that I

was the esteemed Mr. Pinkerton travelin' in disguise. Can I trust you with a secret? I was not. I repeat it, pinch me, pinch me! Before I throw my arms around your shoulders for pure government test, bottled-in-bond joy and make a scene here on the street, tell me what you're doing."

"I'm working and saving up my money," replied the late outlaw.

"At what?"

"I'm selling the Railey Fire-Escape Belt," answered Clem, dropping his head.

"The what? Pinch me, pinch me! Maybe after all I stepped in too quick ahead of the lieutenant. I'm sorry if I have interfered with the course of the law. If I hadn't cut it strictly out I'd come around and get a few pointers, but them days are all over for me now. I went home and the thread of hope is still unbroken. The girl's gone—but my wife still believes in me—and by a gnat's heel she's not going to be disappointed." Real earnestness lay under the light words.

"How in the world do you come to be here?" Clem put in at the first chance.

"I hadn't any more'n lit on the sweetest spot in the world—the climbing vines are all over the front porch now—than I got word to come down here and spend a few days in the factory learning how the Universal Hog Medicine is made and take the regular course of training for salesmen. Before me hogs'll be layin' around in droves, no color in their eyes, their foreheads feverish and no pulse to speak of; as quick as I pass by with that sovereign remedy—the Universal Hog Cholera Cure—the poor creatures will spring to their feet, all energy and ambition, a new light in their eyes, their pulses leaping with the blood of youth, determined to live on and weigh in at three fifty.

"What is the backbone of our country? The answer is—hogs. Also the side-meat, but passing over that, did you ever stop to think about a million of poor pigs born in this country every year and of how few of them

reach maturity? The poor little creatures are full of the zest of living—at first; they bounce up and whirl around on their four little pins, nibble one another's ears and punch their patient parent in the abdomen with their little pink noses, enjoying every breath. Then one day a shadow comes into their lives. One of the happy family loses its appetite; the sight of the others all lined up, their thin tongues out getting their supper, turns its stomach. The light dies in its eyes and it refuses to play and romp with its merry brothers and sisters. Its nose becomes stopped up; a low dry cough sets in and its flanks sag in like a carpet on the line.

"Then one day two of its brothers in romping stumble over its cold body; not knowing what to make of it they rush to their mother. She colors and gasps and leads them rapidly away in the opposite direction. The following day another one of the happy group begins to cough and one by one they are carried away, till at last the mother is alone in the world, grief-stricken and childless. Nothing

has been done to keep the loved ones at her side; she sticks her nose in the dust on the south side of the pen, fills her lungs time after time till at last she—a broken-hearted suicide—follows her offspring to that bourne from which no pig ever returns. Now, is it not a noble mission to bear to the suffering world that peerless compound, the Universal Hog Cholera Cure, nature's own remedy, made from herbs, roots and extractions, containing no poison, prussic acid or antimony, large size one dollar, small fifty cents?"

Clem gathered from the few grains in the verbal chaff that Brassy was taking the course of training for salesmen and that he had really given up the old life.

"Where'll we stay to-night?" asked Clem.

"I don't feel anything calling me back there, do you? If your bed was like mine you won't wake up in the night and cry for it. Did you leave any of your jew'lry?"

"All of it, I reckon, since I haven't got it with me," returned Clem.

"We'll not show up there again. One thing

certain, and that is the young sleuth won't breathe a word about it for a week and then we'll be safe."

Together they found a hotel for the night.

"They're going to send me out on the road to-morrow to sell Nature's Own Remedy," said Brassy, as they hung their coats over the backs of chairs, and piled into bed. "I don't know where I'll land first—some forsaken hole, I suppose. But anyway, it's on the square and that's the routing for me from now on. Say, bo, don't it seem queer for us to be turning in together without Gib, the trusted turnkey? I'd like to go back and sell him a carload of Universal!"

CHAPTER XV

A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE

MRS. Kiggins had dropped in to see Hulda. She had run in the back way, for on baking morning there is nothing worse than to have parlor company.

"Take that chair there," said Hulda, waving her elbow toward a chair whose seat had been made by the weaving and interweaving of leather boot-tops cut into strips the width of an apple peeling. "It's gettin' kind of rickety since Clem joined the great majority. He was layin' out to fix it, but hadn't got around to it. He could fix anything. Handiest man around the house I ever saw. It's terrible the way I get this crust now. The handle's been off this rolling pin for a week and I get everything wobsidled. Clem could fix it in a minute. One thing I'm doing he would like, I know,

and that is keeping Garibaldi for him. I hated him like pizen at first, but he is really awfully cute and as full of mischief as a gourd is of seeds. It still makes me a little mad when he throws my dishes on the floor. That's the worst habit he's got, though, except jumpin' on my back when I ain't thinkin' and scarin' me to death."

"He was a good man, Miss Pointer. Nobody in this whole town'd be missed the way he is. He never said much—just kind of smiled and was gentle and dreamy—but Mr. Kiggins was sayin' just yesterday he would give anything to have an old-fashioned talk with Clem. I can see him just like it was now, the way he reached over and pointed down into the water."

"But they didn't tell him about it before he went," said Hulda, as if speaking to herself. She reached for the rolling pin, powdered it with dry dough, and flattened out the cuttings. "All comes of not knowing when to tell people you love them—when to lock the stable." Her lips ran over the sentence to herself, then,

as if strengthening her judgment, repeating it in a half whisper.

As the days dragged out Rencie's unending search for his former friend went on. He kept his badge bright and his eyes eager.

There was little evidence at first, but there never was much, according to the books. One clue was enough and he had that—the watch-charm belonging to Doctor Fordyce, which he himself had found on the river bank after Clem's disappearance.

He had never liked Doctor Fordyce. The doctor had been in Curryville only a short time and few knew anything about him. Rencie dodged at his heel day after day, but nothing ever came of it. If Doctor Fordyce was guilty he did not show it by word or glance. He seemed to have nothing on his mind, but that was only the way with accomplished crooks. Although Rencie had little to build on, and less to feed his suspicion on, he did not slacken his efforts to fasten the crime on Curryville's newest doctor.

There was one perplexing question that con-

stantly rose up before Rencie—what possible motive could Doctor Fordyce have had? There always must be a motive—all books said that. One day in sifting out possible motives Hulda's words about the lots in the Bellows Bottom flashed over him.

That solved it—Doctor Fordyce wished to get Clem's lots so that he could go ahead with the factory. Once more Rencie began to shadow Doctor Fordyce. As this brought no evidence, he decided to make a search of Doctor Fordyce's room at the New Palace. As he strolled into the lobby he noticed that there was a new clerk on duty. Rencie knew that he could get past him and up the stairway and then let himself into Doctor Fordyce's room with a pass-key, but that wouldn't be the way a real detective would work. So he waited until later in the evening, slipped around behind the building and climbed up the gutter pipe—the way any detective would do. Panting, he slid over the window-ledge into the room.

It did not look much like a doctor's room. There were several unopened cases in the cor-

ner, evidently containing medicine. Bottles of all sizes were piled on one window-sill, with a row of medical books on the mantelpiece. Retorts and beakers stood backed in a corner; suits were piled over chairs, a suit-case with the lid half closed sulked in the corner, the slit looking like a great gashed mouth. In the drawer of the bureau were some letter-heads with the name of a Kansas City development syndicate on them, and on a table in the middle of the room for everybody to see was a glass case of silver medical instruments.

Rencie turned to one thing after another, looking through the drawers, examining the dust on top of the windows, opening the medical books and putting his nose in the beakers in truly professional style. He could not have told sulphuric acid from benzine, but that was the way they always did in books. He fumbled along under the mantelpiece, but no secret door swung open.

He was just on the point of slipping out when his eyes fell upon a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, bent and twisted. He recognized

them at a glance—Clem's. He drew back, catching in his breath sharply, startled by his discovery. This was more than he was counting on. "Smashed in the fight," he breathed heavily. He paused, trembling at this evidence of the doctor's guilt. The seriousness of his discovery overwhelmed him and he trembled at what it would lead to. It flashed over him that possibly Doctor Fordyce could explain it, but when he righted himself he knew that there was only one explanation—and that made his hand tremble so that he had to put down the glasses.

A step was heard in the hall; it was coming toward the room he was in. A hand fumbled for the knob and a key rattled against the door nosing for the hole. It was the doctor returning.

Rencie looked desperately around for a means to escape. He could not possibly get to the window, open it and make good his escape before the person would be in on him.

His mind leaped back over the books he had read but not one of them told how to es-

cape when the suspected person unexpectedly returned. It simply wasn't done in the best detective books. Usage had sanctioned it the other way about—the sleuth should always come upon the guilty person gazing fascinated at evidence of his crime and not the criminal return and find the inspector gathering evidence—especially when the detective didn't have his trusty Derringer with him. But usage didn't keep the key from grating in the lock.

Rencie looked wildly around the room for some means of escape. The closet was big, but he was certain to be trapped in it. A thought rushed through his mind to pretend to be walking in his sleep, but a doctor would be able to tell at a glance if he were really sleeping and he might catch him and give him a hypodermic! Of course he could spring upon the doctor and overcome him—even though the doctor was six feet something and thick through the shoulders—the book always said so, but his evidence had not all been gathered and it would ruin everything now to show

his hand. Especially so when the doctor was so thick through the shoulders. Most villains weren't so tall, being small and with black mustaches while Doctor Fordyce was tall and smooth shaved. That rule might not work on tall smooth-shaved criminals. Rencie was pretty sure it wouldn't.

A hand fell upon the knob.

Something had to be done and done quickly. He threw books to the wind—they were surprisingly inadequate—and looked again over the room for some place to hide. He dived under the bed and had scarcely drawn in his legs when the villain entered.

The suspected party slipped out of his coat, swung it over the back of a chair, and sat down to read. He read and read; instead of going about the room and peeking into a hidden recess to bring out some ghastly souvenir of the foul deed and to fasten his bloodshot eyes on it, unable to escape the fascination of the crime, the man kept on reading. How could a person with mind clogged with memory of such a murder be able to read? Still

criminal minds were of a very low order of intellect and maybe, after all, he was trying to forget the horrible scene by getting his mind on something else.

Slowly inch by inch Rencie wormed back to the far side of the bed and drew his feet farther up.

At last the man in the chair put down the magazine, stood up and gave a heavy sigh. Ah, that was the first indication of grief that he had shown! Only it did seem a bit strange that he wouldn't sigh until he was starting to bed. Unfastening his collar, he flung it on the bureau and backed out of his shirt. Taking his position in the middle of the floor he began exercising, filling his lungs and slapping his breast. Then up and down he raised himself, squatting on his haunches and coming up again, his hands on his hips. Rencie could see just enough of the intruder's body to appreciate how splendidly muscled his enemy was; it was a good thing that he had not followed the book and leaped upon him when he pushed open the door. No doubt the slayer

took exercise just so that he could keep himself in trim for an unexpected emergency—like a detective springing upon him just as he was coming through a door.

After ages and ages the desperate man piled into bed with a chorus of sighs and groans as though it was tearing him to pieces. "Ah," thought Rencie, "at last his conscience is beginning to trouble him."

Maybe he might talk in his sleep. He couldn't remember the statistics in regard to this.

After more moans and tossings the weary soul on the mattress became quiet and the avenger underneath knew that sleep was beginning to shake out its raven wings. Then his own troubles began. The New Palace wasn't famous on account of its spotless rooms; instead it drew particular attention to its matchless southern cooking. It's a poor sort of wayside inn that hasn't matchless southern cooking. To be sure the sheets were always white; but the sheets were on the bed. Under the bed was different—people didn't sleep there.

And it would be an ill-mannered guest who would look under the bed.

Something began working in Rencie's nose. It started down at the end and gradually worked back, crawling up the inside like a feather. He wrinkled up his face, doubled up his hands and brought them to his breast as if to hold it back. But the feather wasn't to be treated that way. His shoulders raised—*kerchoo!* and came down like a trap. The feather had come out.

The long slow breathing stopped. The man above sprang up; a white leg shot out and a foot dropped down within a few inches of Rencie's face. Rencie's hands were still gripped over his breast and he pushed them down hard over his heart to keep it from shaking the bed. Surely the man could feel it even if he could not hear it. He would die fighting. But it was a shame that he should be killed so early in his career. When his friends and relatives came and found his crushed and mangled body they would know that he had died fighting. Detectives always died fighting.

He could see the head-lines in the Kansas City papers:

TRAPPED BY CRIMINAL, COOL DETECTIVE DIES FIGHTING

Somewhere in the second largest type would be:

HANDICAPPDD BY UNSURMOUNTABLE ODDS THE YOUTHFUL SLEUTH FOUGHT COURAGEOUSLY ON TILL HIS STRENGTH EBBED AWAY

The white leg remained still for a moment, then reached back under the bed and began feeling around. The heel poked the youthful sleuth in the ribs.

Rencie grabbed for the leg; in such a case as this a detective should hurl the criminal to the floor and use ju-jutsu. The idea was splendid —but how did one use ju-jutsu on the floor? But the leg snapped back before his hands could close around it.

The man leaped out of bed and turned on the light.

"Say, bo, you're wasting your time," called out the man. "You'll find me mighty poor picking."

Rencie rolled out, ready to spring to his feet and hurl himself like a catapult at the enemy—a detective always did that before he died fighting.

"Though you have the upper hand of me, you foul monster, I will yet give you a worthy fight. Prepare yourself."

But when Rencie came to his feet ready to catapult himself at his cringing enemy he stopped short. His hands dropped weakly at his sides. He had never before seen the fat, good natured looking man before him.

It was Brassy.

"You needn't got under there—I wasn't going to hurt you."

Rencie's hands fitted in closer to his sides than ever, all the catapultian strength gone from them. "Oh, I thought you were Doctor—somebody else."

"Sorry, bo," smiled Brassy. "You understand it ain't my fault. I hate to put you to all this trouble. I'm the last person in the world to cause a hard working dip any extra trouble. I used to be good on my feet myself. Are you workin' this town regular now? I was intending to do some business here myself, but I guess I had better change my place."

A light of understanding broke over Rencie. This other fellow was a real burglar! He would lead him out.

"Oh, so you just got in"— he would be professional—"bo."

"You're on—the midnight train. Say, pardner, what are the chances here?"

Rencie picked a dusty raveling from his clothes and blew it carelessly away. "It's poor picking, pard." That certainly was professional.

"I had a hard time getting a place here tonight, and only after a lot of palaver would the thick-headed clerk let me in. I guess he's a new clerk—important as he acted. I'd like

to give him a dose of my sovereign remedy—the Universal Hog Cholera Cure."

This was queer talk. It didn't seem to mean anything. Rencie, still stunned by finding the wrong man in bed, could only blink. Brassy's next words astonished him even more.

"Say, ain't you pretty young to be workin' the second story? You don't look like a real porch climber to me."

When Rencie saw that he was being mistaken for a night thief he explained his presence. "I'm not a second-story man." That was the expression to use. "I crawled under the bed to play a joke on a fellow—on the fellow who has this room—and you turned out to be him! I guess the new clerk got things mixed up and gave you the wrong key."

"You oughtn't to do a thing like that, son—it gives a fellow an awful start. Goodness knows this hotel gives a fellow enough things, the way it is, without havin' a strange person get under the bed and holler 'Boo!' My company sent me up here to do missionary work

among your tillers of the soil, selling the great and imperial Universal Hog Cholera Cure, but when I land here I find a telegram telling me to move on to another territory to spread my gospel of kindness to all hogs."

Rencie's eyes blinked harder than ever. Listen as closely as he might he could not quite make out what Brassy meant.

"What do you do for a living?" asked Rencie with startling pointedness.

"I save the lives of innocent thousands. I bring joy and happiness into the homes of thousands and thousands each year. I keep families together. I keep the mother from withdrawing into a dark corner, turnin' her feet to the changin' sky and passin' on to that land that is far fairer than ours. I refer to the mother of pigs. Do you know how many young, innocent pigs just bursting into the bloom of young manhood and womanhood are swept away each year by that dread disease, cholera?"

"No," admitted Rencie, swept back by the whirlwind of words.

"One million, two hundred thousand," returned Brassy impressively. "Two million, four hundred thousand hams, twenty million four hundred thousand pounds of side-meat lost forever each year by the ravages of that cruel disease. But all is not lost; there is yet hope. It is the Universal Hog Cholera Cure, large bottle one dollar, half size fifty cents."

Rencie was disappointed. After all, the voluble guest wasn't a confidence man, nor even a burglar.

"I don't want to seem impolite or anything that way," Brassy hurried on, "but if I am going to get that early train out you'll have to excuse me." He pulled up one fat knee and yawned.

Rencie took the hint. Opening the door he passed into the hall and tiptoed up the back way without being seen by the new clerk, his evidence safe and secure. As Brassy was leaving on the early train there was little danger of his mentioning the affair to anybody.

The next morning Rencie went around to the New Palace with fear and faltering, but

sure enough his acquaintance of the night had taken the early train. Doctor Fordyce had not returned during the night and, on questioning, the proprietor could not remember where Doctor Fordyce was on the night of Clem's disappearance; he was only certain of the fact that he had not been in his room all night.

The hemisphere watch-charm had belonged to Doctor Fordyce. The net was slowly gathering about the doctor. The turn affairs might take made Rencie tremble. He hated that it should be anybody that he knew—even though he disliked him and even though he put his hand on his head and called him "sonny." He wished the net were closing about some wandering tramp. Still he knew that the criminal always turned out to be the person you suspected least of all . . . and justice was justice and the stern law must take its course.

Armed with his evidence, Rencie hurried to Marshal Jupes.

"Any more clues, officer?" he asked with

professional mien. "Officer" sounded much more important that "Mr. Jupes."

"Yes, some more," returned Mr. Jupes with natural official hesitation, fitting his coat over the bulge in his hip pocket. "Yes, some, but not so much. As good or better than we had hoped."

"When do you think you'll close in on the malefactor?"

The law moved in a mysterious way its wonders to perform, and Officer Jupes believed in adding to the veil of mystery that surrounded order and justice. "Purty soon, purty soon. Everything ain't just ready yet; I wisht I could explain such things to you, Rencie, but it takes years of study to master the perplexities of the law, and you are young yet."

Rencie tried to look calm and unconcerned as he made his reply, for sleuths always took everything as a matter of fact and no one was ever able to detect the slightest trace of emotion on their faces. He hoped that his face was immobile; he wasn't quite sure what that was, but by looking out the window with a

far-away expression his face would no doubt have all the immobility necessary.

"I know who the guilty wretch is," Rencie said, his eyes out the window.

The minion of the law studied him curiously a moment, hesitating between smiling and eagerness.

"I have run the fiend to earth," the immobility of his face becoming more apparent than ever.

Mr. Jupes rose excitedly. "What do you mean, anyway?" he demanded.

"I can put my hand on the inhuman monster who committed the foul deed."

Mr. Jupes dropped a trembling hand on Rencie's shoulder and bent his head around until he could look squarely into Rencie's face. But he could gather no message there. "This is a serious thing, boy," he exclaimed.

"The dastardly blackguard is even now in our midst."

Jupes studied the boy a moment and impressed by his seriousness, clumped over to the door and locked it.

They were closed from sight for more than an hour and when the door opened Marshal Jupes hurried down the street and turned up the wooden stairs that led to Judge Woodbridge's office. Mr. Kiggins' telephone rang and in a minute he was going up the same wooden flight; leaning out the window Judge Woodbridge called to Mr. Knabb, and he, catching the tone, came breathlessly up the worn steps. The telephone at the New Palace jangled and in a few minutes the proprietor paused to catch his breath, then knocked nervously at Judge Woodbridge's door.

At the end of two hours Marshal Jupes walked down Main Street toward the New Palace, outwardly calm; but had you known him very well you would have seen that his hand kept slipping back almost unconsciously toward his right hip pocket. In a few minutes he returned side by side with Doctor Fordyce, his hands free and the right one swinging near the same hip pocket. Neither was talking, but aside from that almost any one would have believed that they were taking a social stroll.

Only they didn't go toward the Chautauqua Grounds, nor even in the direction of the water-works, nor out toward Lovers' Lane. Instead they turned down Ash Street and into the brick calaboose.

No one seemingly had paid any attention to them, had scarcely noticed that they were on the street—until the red door of the jail closed behind them. Two men standing in front of the post-office discussing fall rye stopped talking and fastened their eyes on the red door curiously; a man lounged out of the lumber yard with an apron swinging from his shoulders and sat down on a keg, his face turned toward the jail.

Mr. Knabb came down the wooden steps and was hurrying up the street when some one stopped him, and coming close asked him a question. He shook his head non-committally and turned away. The man then hastened to the eager group in front of the post-office.

That night the mob came.

In reality it didn't come; it was already there; it merely melted into a blur in the dark-

ness. A few men walked past the jail without turning their heads toward it; keeping them painfully straight ahead. They turned down the street toward the railroad trestle where it ran high over Clear Branch. Behind the square pillars that supported the bridge were other men, all singularly quiet, without masks or even a coat collar turned up. Figures came tramping up the middle of the street, keeping away from the loose boarded walk. They peered into one another's faces with scarcely a word of greeting.

A figure in a coonskin cap approached, his shoes crunching in the dust, and dropped something that sounded like a sack of potatoes, except that there was a slight metallic clink. He kicked it with his foot.

"I couldn't get the swivel off," he said hoarsely, "but a well rope'll do the work as good as anything."

"This goes with it," whispered another voice, taking up the same hoarse pitch, and drawing a leather strap from his pocket. A buckle rattled. "It's a hame-string, and the

buckle works easy. It'll keep his feet from kickin'."

Across the left arms of several of the men rested long objects that looked like peavies, but men never carry peavies in the hollows of their left arms.

Two men stepped back a few feet from the abutment of the bridge, and a long arm lifted toward the cross-ties. "About thirty-five feet," said one, and the other voiced a nasal agreement. The two melted into the crowd again.

A "hack" turned the corner, the farm team jogging down the dusty street, the chains of the work harness clinking merrily. A lone figure sat hunched on the front seat, humming fragments of *Good-by, My Lover, Good-by,* evidently inspired to the rendition by too much of Joe's Place. The men massed behind the timbers and the farmer rolled by, oblivious that there was a soul in a hundred yards of him.

A hand reached into an inside pocket, a head was thrown back, a throaty gurgle told what was happening, and the back of a hand rasped across a stubbled chin. Before the flask could

be put away the nearest neighbor nudged and whispered, "Sure, I'll take some." Another neighbor also felt disposed and in a minute the empty bottle sailed in an arc and dropped into the wayside weeds.

"When my boy had the fever he set up with him three nights straight," said a hoarse voice in the crowd. "That's what he did—three nights straight."

"Last spring when I had the rheum'tism," came another thick voice out of the darkness, "and couldn't go around damp places, he bailed the water out of my cellar every day during the wet spell."

No names were mentioned; it was always *he*. Whether the reference was to Clem, or to the prisoner, no name was used.

"I never liked him from the first time I laid my eyes on him," snapped a bitter voice. "But I never dreamed he had this in him."

The men knotted closer together and a distinct rumble of anticipation ran over them.

Outlined in the distance was the brick jail; near the top of the rear a lamp glimmered and

even at that distance it could be seen that bars measured off the light. A shadow came slipping down the road from the back of the brick structure, came hurrying down the dusty street and paused at the edge of the crowd. Heads bent forward, silently and questioningly, and hands crept unconsciously to hip pockets.

"It's all right, boys," guaranteed the man with the coonskin cap. Then he turned to the black figures and shot an arm out in a commanding gesture. "They don't suspicion anything up there, and that's his light burnin'. It's all right, boys."

That was all that was needed. Almost as if with one foot they stepped off, keeping to the middle of the street. Massed, they moved to the dairy building, crossed the walk without more than touching a toe to it, some leaping. Hats came down over eyes, hands went to hip pockets and brought out bits of shining metal; the well rope clinked and one or two figures lurched perceptibly.

The man with the coonskin cap held up a hand, tiptoed on to the steps and was reaching

out for the door-knob when the red door pulled back before his face and Marshal Jupes stood before him. The lamp, hanging on the wall behind him, showed a squat figure in whose hands was gripped a short repeating rifle. His hair was tossed and tumbled and one suspender dangled, showing a hasty toilet.

"Boys," rose a high wavering voice, "I know what you come for. But you can't have him, you can't have him." The voice was not certain, and even in the shadow the face whitened. "We don't want no trouble, boys, but I'm going to do my duty. If he's guilty the law'll be enforced."

"He's guilty all right," cut in a voice, "and we want him. You better not make trouble."

"Now, boys, you don't know," dropping from assertion to argument. "You don't know for sure, and you'll be sorry if you do anything hasty."

A hand circled above the crowd unseen by the figure in the door, a noose swished through the air and dropped on Jupes' shoulder. Some one had tried to lariat him. He ducked back

and slammed the red door behind him. Scarcely had the door locked before a shot sputtered into the wood. Another shot flattened against the bricks. A return shot from the inside whistled over the heads of the crowd. The men parted around either corner. A rock went crashing through a window. A heavy log was swung around the corner, two men on each side. The men swung it back and forth a couple of times to get the rhythm of their bodies, and the figure in a coonskin cap grated his breath out harshly as a signal and the battering-ram crashed against the door. The door flew open, swinging limply on one hinge, the end of the log sticking through the splintered panel, like a camel's nose.

"Now, men" yelled the man in the coonskin cap defiantly, "all together. He's our man!"

The men surged forward with a chorus of yells, shouts and curses in all keys.

But there was one figure quicker than all the rest. Pushing his way through the crowd he leaped through the door, darted inside,

called a sentence to Jupes and was back in the door with the officer's gun.

"Stop where you are," he commanded with so much authority that the men poised on their toes, ready to release their muscles and finish the action. "Stand where you are till I tell you one thing!"

Outlined against the light, his shoulders squared, his head up, the repeating rifle in his hands, stood Rick Oody.

"In reality I've got two things to tell you." His voice was high and clear. There was a commanding something about him that no one had ever dreamed of before, a power that made even the man in the coonskin cap drop his shoulders and settle back. "The first thing is this: the first man that moves toward this door is a dead man, and the second and the third, just as long as I last. You may be able to get me but some of you'll never go home. Hen Riley, if you swing that lariat at me I'll shoot you cold. Damn it, there's nothing I'd rather do.

"The second thing is this: don't you raise that gun, Bill Smith, or I'll plug you through the eye. I know positively that Doctor Fordyce didn't kill Clem Pointer. I know it. I hate the doctor just as much as any of you—more I guess. Didn't my little girl die and him waitin' on her?—but I ain't going to see you string him up when he ain't guilty. I know positively that he didn't kill Clem and that's all I can tell you about it."

"Who did then?" demanded a heavy voice.

"I ain't saying that anybody did—we ain't ever found his body. You don't know anything about what happened except findin' some things. I can't tell you any more; but one thing I do know, and that is Doctor Fordyce didn't kill him."

There was authority in the way Rick Oody lifted his head, and in the way his shoulders held themselves stiff and rigid in the panel of light. Never before in the whole history of Curryville had any one paid the slightest attention to him, but now they realized that a power stood before them. Rick had seen Clem and knew that he was still in the flesh. If he

I'm just Rick Oody, the town drunkard

could have said this the crowd would have melted away, but he had promised Clem that not one word should pass his lips as to what had happened to him, and by that promise Rick's lips were sealed.

"Who are you to be talking this way?" came the demand.

"That's right, I'm just Rick Oody, the town drunkard, the man who does your dirty work and buries your horses, but I know what I am talking about." There was an assurance about him, a power in his attitude, an authority in his words that no one in Curryville would have guessed possible. "If anybody comes inside this lock-up to-night it'll be over my dead body—and mine won't be the only one. I know who most of you are, and Jupes has heard me call out some of your names and you know what that'll mean if it comes up in law. Now, I'm goin' in, boys, and I'm goin' to set just inside that door, all night—with this gun on my knee."

Slowly he turned his back full upon the crowd, stepped across the log and disappeared behind the red door. From the barricade came

Rick's voice, the same measured assurance in it as before: "Boys, I'm goin' to keep that lamp lit so that you'll know who is the first one down."

The mob stood hesitating, breathing heavily.

"Go on back to the trestle, boys—with your well rope—and think it over."

The attitude of the men, their necks out, their lips set, relaxed, their eyes left the red door, and each looked at the other. The man with the coonskin cap reached one foot behind him and the crowd edged back, without turning their faces. Silently they flowed around the corner of the little brick building, crossed the board walk and gathered in the dusty street.

Then two figures turned back and walked without hesitation up to the edge of the porch. Hen Riley and the man with the greasy moth-eaten cap dragged the log out of the splintered panel of the red door, carried it down the middle of the street and flung it shamefully in the gully underneath the trestle.

The mob had been quelled, and the prisoner was safe.

CHAPTER XVI

BRASSY'S IDEA

CLEM found another boarding-place in Kansas City where he was quite sure that spilled blood had not leaked clear through to the ceiling below, and worked harder than ever preparing to save thoughtless humanity from the devouring flames by means of the Railey Fire-Escape Belt.

Thoughtless humanity, however, had little worry about the devouring flames, being perfectly content to go on in its headlong way straight to ruin. Still he made a few sales. Inventor Railey's sad optimism kept up; he felt sure that one day—maybe to-morrow—thoughtless humanity would see the error of its way and do something to protect its loved ones.

The city ground on him harder and harder.

After the glamour and whirl of the first few days had worn off it became a millstone around his neck.

One evening he was standing in front of the bulletin-board, one of a wild mass of hurrahing humans. Somebody somewhere had just slid in home and hats went up in the air and men pounded one another on the shoulders as if some brave fireman had leaped to safety on a Railey Belt with a beautiful yet sobbing woman in his arms. And there was nothing to see except a diamond-shaped thing about as big as a checker-board—wouldn't he like to have another game with Judge Woodbridge? —nailed on the side of a building.

Above the miniature baseball diamond a bulletin was posted. Clem's eyes leaped to it:

DR. FORDYCE, ALMOST LYNCHED,

NOW TO OWN CITY

Last Week Curryville Was Ready to Hang Doctor—This week Willing to Give Him Valuable Option.

Clem brushed the back of his hand across his eyes with a motion peculiar to him and with parted lips stared at the bulletin.

"Look, look!" exclaimed a man behind him to his companion. "Doctor Fordyce—that's our man!"

The man addressed turned his eyes from the miniature diamond to the news bulletin. "Well, I'll be damned! Sure that's Fordyce, but what does all this mean—almost lynched?"

"*Hsh*—you don't know who's around," warned the other, pushing up his Panama. "He hasn't reported for a week and his orders are to send in word every day. Curryville's the town, all right. We'd better send him a cipher."

The other nodded and the two men hurried away.

Slowly the meaning of it burned into Clem's mind; but even then it was confused and blurred. In some way Doctor Fordyce was the agent of these men and was trying to get something from Curryville. Clem turned and pushed his way through the crowd after the

men. He followed them for half a block, then one of the men hailed a passing taxicab and both leaped in.

Clem paused, uncertain what to do. He had never trusted himself in a machine like that before and besides it would cost—he felt of his thin pocketbook. Why hadn't they taken a street-car? But no time was to be lost. He waved to another taxicab and pointed to the one ahead. "Take me wherever they go," he commanded, and settled back in the cushions.

It was his first ride; the machine made a lot of noise and racket until one would have thought it was going to blow up the next moment, and it was not easy riding as a buggy either. He leaned forward looking out of the window curiously, elated, wondering what Hulda would think of him now if she could see him. What did that little finger on the dial mean that kept crawling over a circle of figures?

The machine drew up with a cough, and the chauffeur opened the door. "They're getting out," he said.

As Clem hurried through the door of an office building he saw the elevator closing on them. The door clicked and their feet disappeared into the floor above. Where would they get off? He had just as well be a hundred miles from them as not to know where they got off. On the next trip he asked to be put off at the same floor with the men. On the frosted door before him was painted "The Southern Development Company." This made the mystery deeper than ever, for what should a southern development company have to do with Curryville, and, above all, with Doctor Fordyce and an attempted lynching. Still he felt certain that he was on the right trail. This seemed about the end of the scent, for how could he find out what was going on inside the closed doors? If he should go in he could only stay a moment—he had suffered from experience—without being able to get any more information.

The door next to the Southern Development Company was open. Clem slipped in; the janitor was at work on the floor. Clem looked out

the window that opened on the court; it was within a few feet of the development company's window. A plan flashed through his mind. Stepping out on the broad window-ledge he leaned over until he could hear the men talking.

"Isn't that fine?" one of them was saying. "He can close it up by Friday. That is when they have the special election to vote on it. He's a live wire all right. I guess we'd better take him into the firm when—"

Clem's heart was leaping high, but then something happened behind him. The janitor had closed the window and he was locked outside four stories from the ground. He heard no more of the conversation; he peered over and felt a peculiar sinking on his left side. Pushing back his hat he looked into the room he had just left. The janitor had gone out, closing the door. When he strained at the window he found that it was locked. He was trapped.

He could break the window, but the sound of falling glass would bring a curious crowd,

and besides, the door might be locked. He must act quickly, for the strain on his feet was telling.

Carefully he stepped across to the other window, gripped the casing and pushed a leg in.

"Look there—what's that?" exclaimed one of the development men at sight of the encroaching foot. Clem stiffly climbed inside.

"What do you mean?" demanded one of them. "Call the police."

Clem stepped on the floor and straightened up, short of breath. "Gentlemen," he said, "have I the pleasure of addressing representatives of the Southern Development Company?"

"What do you want?" snapped the other.

"Do you gentlemen realize that fire destroys more lives each year than any other agent in the world outside of sickness? Hundreds are hanged, thousands go down in the ocean each year, but tens of thousands are swept off this earth by the most horrible known death—fire. I have here the Railey Fire-Escape Belt and with it I am able to enter your office in such an unceremonious fashion. Strong as a cable,

light as a feather, no cork to become rotten and useless, and can be adjusted in six seconds with one hand while holding in the other arm a loved one. The only belt on the market where two or more can escape from the devouring flames at the same time. Can be put out of sight under a desk; on the wall it makes an attractive ornament. Do you know you owe it to your loved ones to protect yourself?"

The men glanced at each other, taken back by the torrent of words. "Say, but you got some nerve!" exclaimed the dark-complexioned one. "You ought to sell stock."

"You may not need it to-morrow, but sooner or later your life may depend on it, and without the Railey Fire-Escape Belt your loved ones may be made widows and orphans. A complete diagram explaining its adjustment accompanies each belt. A man in Tasmania said it saved his whole family. It saves people from burning to death in office buildings, factories, homes, houses and hotels. Perhaps one of you has had some loved one snatched out of your arms into the jaws of that ter-

rible monster—fire; perhaps you have had a wife, sister or sweetheart perish just beyond your finger-tips for lack of a safety belt. Special rates for orders of more than a dozen."

The two men looked into each other's eyes and smiled. The peril of their loved ones perishing just beyond their finger-tips in the jaws of the terrible monster didn't worry them very much, and the fact that it was the only belt on the market that could be adjusted in six seconds while holding the loved one with the other arm didn't bring home the need of the belt as might be expected, nor did the added inducement of special rates for wholesale quantities make them feel the grave danger that was hanging over them.

"Say, you've got a great line of talk," said the dark-complexioned one. "You oughtn't to be wasting your time on fire-escape belts and loved ones when you could sell stock. How'd you like to sell some Oriole Mining Stock?"

Clem swept his eye over the office. On a desk was a telegram which he felt might be from Doctor Fordyce. While gradually back-

ing toward the message he explained that he felt called to let the world know about the wonders of the Railey Fire-Escape Belt so that mankind could escape from fire which had always been a surly servant, since man subdued it, thus rising above the animals, but which still strikes back, cruelly, relentlessly. His hand closed on the yellow sheet.

"But," insisted the swarthy one, half humorously, "why not leave something for your wife, sister or sweetheart in case the wire snaps and you are hurled headlong to the bloody pavement?"

"It's made of the best steel and will not break, and it's capable of supporting the weight of three loved ones."

"Say, you're all right. You bring it home all right till a fellow really gets to thinking about his wife, sister or sweetheart weeping her heart out at the window waiting for a fellow to come back. That's the secret of successful salesmanship—make it personal." Clem insisted that his heart was given to the Railey Belt, but that he would drop back again some

day to see if they had come to appreciate their loved ones at their truth worth, though inflecting his voice as if to say that he might not find them, for no one ever knew when the terrible monster was going to seize unbelievers in its devouring jaws. He closed the door behind him and stumbled his way toward the elevator. His knees sagged and his heart was pounding. The elevator made him think of the horror of falling. He was glad when he was outside.

"Here I am," called a voice at the curbing. "Get right in."

It was the taxicab man. There was more of a command than a welcome in his voice. Clem piled in before he knew what he was doing.

"Where to?" asked the taxicab man, holding the door open.

Clem had no idea where, but of course he must go somewhere. He could tell that by the way the man spoke. "Up the street—then back."

The man glanced at him sharply as if to

make up his mind about something and snapped the door.

In a few minutes Clem realized that he was out of the immediate danger of discovery by the Southern Development Company, but another cloud was falling over him. He leaned forward anxiously, and as near as he could estimate it he owed the taxicab man two dollars and eighty cents. He understood now; the man had been charging for his wait; nervously he fumbled through his pockets. All he could bring to light was two dollars and twenty cents and a few signed orders for the Railey Fire-Escape Belt. And the fare was going up all the time. He was afraid of the chauffeur; he had always been timid of waiters, conductors and policemen.

There was one consolation, anyway—he had evidence in the shape of a telegram. He drew it out of his pocket, glanced at it and settled back limply. Then he leaned forward as if to call to the man at the wheel, but sank back more limply than ever. The telegram was in cipher.

The machine came to a spitting stop and the man poked his head inside. "We've seen this street now. Cliff Drive?"

Clem remembered what a long distance it was to the drive. "No," he said weakly, "just go back."

The driver glanced searchingly again. "The same place?"

"Yes, the same place—but go slow."

Surely going slowly would keep the finger from racing around so fast.

Clem sat reading the street signs automatically, searching his mind for a way out. Second-hand clothes could be bought for a song, teeth could be extracted without pain or your money back, with bridge work a specialty; you could get your name printed on neat tasty cards while you waited, while if you had only a dollar you could go in and order the best bedroom set in America for the money—"We believe you are honest." The slant of a shoulder on the sidewalk brought Brassy back to mind. Clem knew that Brassy had been out on the road, but he would go to the home

office of the Universal and at least try to enlist help. Clem ran into a corner drug store, verified the address and called the number to the chauffeur.

The finger pointed to four dollars and twenty cents.

The driver cut a corner, backed into a side street with much turning, starting and retreating, the finger using this as a pretext to leap forward like a thing alive, and finally drew up before the number.

"I'll wait," said the chauffeur, as if he owned his fare. Clem got the floor number from the elevator starter, and opened the door into the office of the Universal. A mass of blond hair arose to meet him.

"Is Mr. Hagan in?"

The girl glanced at the bulletin-board with the names of the salesmen, showing whether they were in or out, and nodded. "Mr. Hagan is engaged," she said, looking on past Clem at her reflection in the glass door. "Have a seat."

Clem changed uneasily from one hip to the

other. "I can wait, but the taxicab—" breaking off as if to imply that a meter waits on neither time nor tide. Especially when it has a good running start.

The girl caught at the word. That was different. Customers that came in taxicabs—"Oh, I'll see. What's the name?"

"Pointer."

"Mr. Philbin?"

"No, Mr. Pointer."

"Phillips?"

"No, Pointer."

"How do you spell it?" patting her hair. Clem called out the seven letters.

"Oh, Painter!" exclaimed the girl with finality, disappearing into the adjoining room.

Brassy appeared at the door, sleeked up till Clem scarcely knew him. Brassy made a dive at him.

"By jooks, I'm glad to see you! Come right in and let me show you around over the home office of that sovereign remedy, the Universal Hog Cholera Cure, that has brought peace and happiness to so many hogs over the length

and breadth of this land. Do you know how many hogs pass away with cholera each year in Missouri alone? Have you ever seen a hog fade and wither under your very eye like a flower in a hot draft? Come with me and I'll show you the one thing that keeps them from joining the great majority, large size one dollar, small fifty cents." Brassy seized Clem by the arm and started to drag him into the maze of offices.

"I can't go." Clem tried to explain so that no one would hear.

"Sure you can," insisted Brassy. "It's made of herbs, roots and nature's own remedies, and contains no antimony."

Clem whispered into Brassy's ear: "I came in a taxicab and—"

"Whew—but we're putting on dog. You must have saved a lot of loved ones to-day."

"But I didn't want to come that way—"

"Oh, that's all right, I won't feel bad. Street-cars are still good enough for me. Have you seen this year's demountable rims and mohair tops?"

"But I haven't paid for it yet."

"I understand—just taken it on trial! See if you can't get them to throw in an extra set of tires."

Clem pinned Brassy in a corner and whispered into his ear. Brassy's face became more serious. "By jooks, we'd just better go down and buy it and send the chauffeur home! I haven't got enough to ride around the block; I'd have to get off at the first muddy crossing and walk. If they were selling taxicabs two for a quarter, I couldn't blow up a bicycle."

Clem put his hand on Brassy's arm. "It's getting higher every minute."

"Give me room to think—stand, I've got an idea!" He whirled away to the cashier's window and came back smiling. "Got an advance on next week's pay. Where's the bandit . . . do you suppose he'd take it out in Universal?"

The two hurried to the elevator and to the street. Brassy paid the man.

"His job beats the old three-shell game," said Brassy, as he drew Clem into a café. "It's

so respectable and you get to ride all the time, too. . . . There's something on your mind, Mr. Pointer. Is the loved one business going bad? Don't the people believe it's light as a feather and strong as a cable?"

"It's not that," answered Clem, and explained about the Southern Development Company.

At mention of the Southern Development Company Brassy's eyes opened. "Say," he exclaimed, "I heard Mr. Sayers, our vice president, talking about them the other day and he knows all about them. They've been putting out a lot of bad stock and have been mixed up in all kinds of shady deals. He'll tell me how to go after them. When is the mass meeting in Curryville?" drumming his fingers.

"Monday night."

The finger march stopped. "Well, the Railey Fire-Escape Belt and the Universal Hog Cholera Cure Company should have representatives on the ground. I guess I can get another advance on my wages."

Stepping over to the telephone he called the information bureau at the railroad station.

"Say," Brassy asked anxiously, coming back, "haven't they got any other hotel there besides the New Palace?"

CHAPTER XVII

OUR FAIR CITY

AFTER the attempted lynching, Curryville was humbled. The generous hearts of its citizens were more than willing to make up for what a few of the worst element had done. Doctor Fordyce was quick to take advantage of their regret. Outraged at first he was ready to bring charges against the town, when another plan occurred to him. When definite word came proving his alibi he flashed the papers in the people's faces and was ready to cram them down their throats. He talked of an expensive lawsuit and of the damage to his reputation. Suddenly his attitude changed. If the people of Curryville would hold an immediate election, condemning the Bellows Bottom and give him an option on the lots for his medicine factory he would say nothing more

about the great damage done him in his profession as a physician.

Tuesday was set for the special election which was to determine whether or not all the property in the bottom was to be condemned and offered to Doctor Fordyce for his promised factory. Curryville had been in a state of lethargy since the disappearance of Clem Pointer, but now it was all excitement. The two sides were about evenly divided. At the city hall on Monday evening the question was to be debated and the voting on the morrow would settle the question once for all.

The crowd came early, massing down in front of the railing.

Outside the railing sat Hulda, her black dress drawn across her bosom as if the buttons were just on the point of flying off, her little black bonnet clamped over her forehead as if no power could raise it. Her black tape-bordered, palm-leaf fan scratched nervously across the front of her black dress, while both of her hands were rounded into balls by the tight-fitting black cotton gloves. By her side

sat Mary Mendenhall, as if hovering near her for comfort. Doctor Fordyce bowed elaborately; she reddened and responded with a formal nod.

Abraham Lincoln had his ax raised, either aiming at a log or threatening Thomas Jefferson just as he was bending over his quill to attach his name to the document that declares all men are born free and equal, while Napoleon, with his hand in the bosom of his surtout, looked over their heads far out to sea. Gazing into the calm eye of the Little Corporal with all its power and mystery you would never guess that by turning the Man of Destiny over you would have as good a checkerboard as you could want.

Rick Oody was busying himself raising and lowering the windows and opening the railing gate when Judge Woodbridge came rolling down the aisle. The judge stopped to lay a hand on his shoulder, at which Rick stiffened with added importance. Two boys, whispering in a back row, pointed to Rick and one of them made a motion as if drawing an imaginary gun

from an imaginary hip pocket. All this so frustrated Rick that he went back and lowered the window to exactly the position he'd found it.

Inside the railing were the speakers. Reverend Sadnow and Mr. Kiggins, who were in favor of pushing the vote through and allowing Doctor Fordyce the option, sat side by side. Nobody realized the seriousness of the situation more than the Reverend Sadnow; he sat crouched down in his chair as though some great hook had seized him under the collar, swung him over the heads of the audience and dropped him in a lump on the cane seat. His hands were out of sight up his sleeves and his head was pitched forward on his breast. The sadness and the sins of the world rested heavily on his shoulders; by his expression you would think that he had been called on to officiate at the tearing down of the last pillar of Sodom rather than to argue for a better, bigger, breezier Curryville.

At his side sat Mr. Kiggins, nervously running his fingers through his beard, and casting

a fidgeting eye over the growing crowd. His glance shot here and there so that no one could tell whether he was merely nervous or was taking this opportunity to discover how many in the audience owed bills at the White Front. Still it was plain to be seen that Mr. Kiggins was a martyr to the cause; he was a sick man and shouldn't be out at all, let alone at night. Only civic pride would make him suffer so—and a chance to speak.

Opposed to the proposition were Mr. Ford, father of Rencie, and Mr. Knabb, both unpopular at a glance.

Judge Woodbridge raised the gavel and the table rattled. "We have assembled here tonight to discuss pro and con whether or not we shall condemn by popular vote to-morrow at the usual polling stations the plat of land to the southwest of the city of Curryville, Nodaway County, State of Missouri, Section twenty-one, Range sixty-four, lots one to forty-two, commonly known as the Bellows Bottom, so that said land, property and assets may pass into the hands of Doc-

tor J. M. Fordyce, his agents, or party or parties whom he may represent." Judge Woodbridge was nothing if not legal. "First on the program we are to have a recitation by Miss Gertie Knabb, entitled *Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night.*"

Gertie came swishing down the aisle, her red bow on her hair standing straight out. Taking her position she looked out over the audience for a moment, swallowed something that kept trying to crawl up into her mouth, stepped back a pace, held one hand over her heart and extended the other arm full length. Her voice was a little bit high and her speaking hurried, but the feeling was there; when the time came to swing on the iron clapper she waved back and forth until the whole audience was swaying with her. Finally she saved the day and went to her seat in a thunder of applause, the thunder being especially pronounced where Mr. Knabb sat.

"The discussion will be opened this evening," said the judge in his heaviest bass, "by Mr. Kiggins, who will endeavor to show us

why we should condemn lots one to forty-two in Section twenty-one, Range sixty-four, commonly known as the Bellows Bottom. It gives me great pleasure to present to you our fellow-townsman, Mr. Kiggins, a celebrated speaker, a prominent citizen, a progressive merchant and proprietor of the famous White Front Hardware Store. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Kiggins."

A round of applause greeted Mr. Kiggins, although every person in the hall knew him by sight and name, and many of them had known him for twenty years.

Mr. Kiggins advanced to the middle of the platform and seized the thin-legged table on which rested a pitcher of ice-water and a tumbler. He seized a corner in each hand as though the thin-legged table were going to take to its heels and leave him all alone on the platform. His heavy hands, more accustomed to clawing nails out of boxes, were never meant to restrain a light table. The pitcher and glass huddled together in fright. Mr. Kiggins' eyes wandered to and fro over the audience and

finally settled on a steel engraving over the door at the end of the hall showing Elihu Burritt, the learned blacksmith, plying his bellows with one hand and holding a book in the other, absorbed at his task of mastering seventeen languages. The tip of Mr. Kiggins' tongue slipped out and went sliding along his lips.

"Ladies and gentlemen," whined his high voice, "we are met on this solemn occasion to discuss a serious question of interest to every man, woman and child in the confines of our fair city."

There could be no doubt that it was a solemn occasion. Mr. Kiggins looked as if the last ray of hope had been blotted out and the sun had risen for the last time.

"However, it gives me great pleasure to appear before such an intelligent audience, an audience composed of the flower of the intellect of our fair city."

The pleasure of Mr. Kiggins' face was not very apparent.

"I was afraid that I would not be able to appear before you to-night. This afternoon

while I was helping load a barrel of salt I stepped off a plank and jerked my back. It kind of seemed to tear something out of me, like as if something caught all your hair in one wad and gave it a yank and lifted up your scalp and some of the roots still stuck like when you pull up sweet-potato vines. Just a few scattering roots catching here and there and the blood drippin' down. Then the pain went up into this shoulder"—Mr. Kiggins swung a heavy hand under his arm in the direction of the unfortunate part—"and settled there till this arm ain't any more good than if it didn't belong to me. I hurt this shoulder fourteen years ago and it ain't right yet, and I guess it'll never be. But I said I'll stick it out if it kills me, and here I am."

There was a grim determination about him as if while the ordeal was not exactly killing him outright it was slowly sapping his vitality. The only way to bear up in spite of the wrenched shoulder was to keep a tight hold on the table and an unwavering eye on the linguistic blacksmith.

"I have always had the interest of our fair city at heart. Twenty years ago this spring comin' I moved to Curryville when a log cabin where the post-office now is and a grist mill down on Diedrich Bend was all the buildings there was. I have seen this place grow steadily from one store and a grist mill to its present astonishing size." Mr. Kiggins' hand lifted, completed a circle which took in a territory seemingly equal to half the size of the country, and came back to its corner with a heavy thud. "Then it was unknown; to-day the fame of Curryville has spread all over this state, into adjoining states and has gone out, like a wave when you throw a pebble into a pond, to the two coasts and even in Canada. Curryville stands for fairness, honesty, progress. It is the city of homes, education and refinement. If her fame is still to increase and grow until it spreads to the four corners of the universe we must be progressive and take on new factories."

Mr. Kiggins was loyal to his fair city. To him it was the greatest in the world; other

towns might have more population but they could not begin to compare with Curryville, the city of homes, education and refinement.

Mr. Kiggins clapped his hands to his eye. "What do I see?" he demanded, looking past the humble blacksmith, who was still plying his bellows, into the dim distance.

The audience turned involuntarily.

"I see a great city with smoke from a dozen factories rising up into the blue heaven; I see paved streets and merry children playing on the sidewalks, and shaded drives with fine ladies whizzing up and down them in automobiles, and men bowing and taking off their hats to 'em. I see a new city hall out of white marble and pigeons on the ridge-pole cooing to their mates, and people down the street in silk hats, and when one man comes riding down the street in his automobile a cheer rends the air. Who is that man?"

Mr. Kiggins paused dramatically. The audience turned anxiously as if to see if by any chance it could be the ambitious blacksmith.

"Who is the man that is responsible for all this?"

Mr. Kiggins raised his thick finger and moved it around over the audience trying to locate the party. But the man referred to wasn't in sight. Mr. Kiggins looked nervously over the hall again but still couldn't find him. His listeners followed the finger expectantly.

"I repeat it, who is that man?" The finger traveled once more over the crowd. "The man is well known," filled in Mr. Kiggins, searching everywhere, "I might say he is well known to every citizen in Curryville—yes, to every man, woman and child in our fair city. He stands for fairness, honesty, progress. It is the city of homes, education and refinement. If her fame—"

Doctor Fordyce appeared in the door.

"There, there he is!" exclaimed Mr. Kiggins excitedly, while the whole audience turned on the new arrival. "His name is—is—" He stammered and colored while his hand swung back to its corner. The name wouldn't come.

"His name is—known to every man, woman and child in our fair city. It is useless for me to repeat it. He is the man who is going to make the name of Curryville heard round the world. When all his factories get goin' turning off his medicine and trucks backing up and derricks loading them on, every bottle will be an advertisement for our fair city. On the wrapper of each one will be 'Dr. Fordyce's Herb Specific—Made in Curryville—Accept no substitute.' These bottles will set on people's pantry shelves year in and year out and the name of Curryville will be constantly before 'em. Every time they go into the kitchen or take a dose of medicine they will think of our fair city. Papers will write it up; they'll put pictures of it on post-cards and property'll double in value. We'll vote on it and the county seat of Nodaway County will be moved to Curryville and mebbe a sky-scraper will go up where the White Front now is."

Cheers burst forth, lead perceptibly by Mrs. Kiggins. Mr. Kiggins' speech was a success; the White Front had been mentioned. Under

a fire of admiring eyes Mr. Kiggins grasped the glass with his heavy fingers, gulped a drink and sat down.

During the applause Rick Oody slipped out unobserved.

Mr. Ford was introduced to answer Mr. Kiggins, but plainly his was not the popular side. Hardly a ripple of applause helped him to his seat. Curryville wanted the Fordyce factories.

Reverend Sadnow was presented by Judge Woodbridge to answer Mr. Ford and back up Mr. Kiggins.

"Brethren and sisters," greeted Reverend Sadnow sadly, taking his position squarely behind the table, both hands out of sight in his sleeves, "all things must change. Grass withers before the morning sun. The temples of yesterday are dust under our feet to-day. No one knoweth whither we goeth; no one knoweth whence we came. We are alive to-day and buried to-morrow. Still, while we hover as a shadow on this terrestrial footstool it behooves us to do all we can to advance. We are as a

breath on the window-pane but we can strive higher, even during that brief moment. The potentate of to-day feeds the worms of to-morrow, but we can live this hurried hour so that when we lie down on the couch and draw the counterpane over us we can go into that unknown void from which no pilgrim returns without a tremble or the quiver of an eyelid."

Reverend Sadnow looked sadly around as if any moment expecting to see some breath fade from the window or some hovering shadow pass from this terrestrial footstool. The audience had been in good humor when Mr. Kiggins sat down, but now it began worrying about the grass withering before the matutinal solar onslaught and what would happen to the poor unsuspecting potentates. Reverend Sadnow's mission in life seemed to be to tell everybody not to laugh since before you finish you might be called into that unknown void from which no pilgrim returns.

One little gleam of hope flickered through the clouds. If the good citizens of Curryville would vote favorably on the morrow and all

should get to work at once building a bigger, better, brighter Curryville, taking care to see that the church was reroofed, they possibly might get something done before the breath faded. Still it must be remembered that all flesh was grass and that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in the twinkling of an eye and that no time was to be lost—especially about fixing up the church.

Mr. Knabb tried to bolster up Mr. Ford's attack, but those against the condemnation were fighting up-hill.

Mr. Kiggins was allowed a few minutes for rebuttal.

"To-morrow will go down in history," said Mr. Kiggins from behind the table. "In years to come it will be a holiday and there will be speeches in honor of the man who came here a stranger and we took him in. A bronze tablet may be erected on this very spot to commemorate our great victory. Our schools will be the best, our factories the busiest, our fire department the most up-to-date in the whole state of Missouri. There is one person to

whom"— Mr. Kiggins thought a moment and went back to the word with pride—"to whom most of the honor is due. Had he not been snatched from our midst things would never have come to a focus. It is to him the bronze tablet should be erected. If anybody wants to take up a collection, the White Front will be the first one to throw in." Hulda loosened her black-bordered handkerchief from her belt and lifted it to her face under shelter of the palm leaf. "Need I mention the name?"

"No, Mr. Kiggins, we all know the brother you mean," said Reverend Sadnow in his deepest voice. "Two months ago well and happy, now only a blessed memory."

"What would he say about the election if he was here?" demanded Mr. Kiggins, swinging a thick thumb toward the fire house. "He owned lots there and stood for fairness, honesty and progress in this city of homes, education and refinement. What would he say?"

There was a commotion at the back end of the hall, just under the studious blacksmith,

and Rick Oody, in advance of two men, called out at the top of his voice:

"He'd say 'No!'"

Rick stepped aside and there was Clem hesitating in the light, his face wrinkled into a dozen smiles. At his side was Brassy.

Mr. Kiggins' finger stopped in mid-air and pointed to the wrinkled and smiling man, as if he could not move it away. Every head in the audience turned; a boy close down in front stood up and soon the whole audience was standing, all staring breathless and open-mouthed. The silence held while the smiling man bowed and waved a friendly hand in his old familiar gesture.

Rencie's high voice was the first to break the silence: "It's him," he screamed.

Hulda carefully laid her bordered fan to one side, leaned over and fainted on Mrs. Kiggins' shoulder.

Reverend Sadnow came to his feet, pulled his hands out and lifted one on high. "The dead hath arisen," he boomed in his deepest bass.

Mr. Kiggins walked to the edge of the platform and bent far over. "It's Clem Pointer!" he exclaimed as if breaking the news to the others. "Just like he allus was."

CHAPTER XVIII

JUST LIKE HIM

THE silence that pressed over all in the court room broke and the hall was in an uproar, everybody talking at once. As Clem passed slowly down the aisle, bowing and smiling, the people drew back in their seats; and once when he reached out his hand the person drew back as if demanding that the proffered palm be proved earthly.

Slowly Clem worked his way to the front, until he reached the long upright bench where Hulda sat. In a moment his arm was around her waist, and under the pressure her eyes opened. "Is it really you, Clem?" she whispered, patting him on the cheek.

"Yes, Hulda, dear," his answer so slow that even Mrs. Kiggins heard nothing.

When he released her he turned expectantly

toward Miss Mendenhall. By this time the hall was in an uproar, people calling his name, crying out messages of welcome to him, words of surprise and sentences of wonder that he was still alive. Half a hundred were asking him questions to which there was no answer and as many more were reaching out hands to welcome him back. But to all this Clem gave no heed. He was looking steadily at Mary Mendenhall.

The girl's face colored and she swayed slightly, but soon recovered herself. Doctor Fordyce's poison had eaten in. Remembrance of all that he had said against Clem came rushing upon her; if Clem had made those insinuations against her she wanted nothing to do with him.

Both of Clem's hands went out to her and his eyes grew large before her. Then she turned her back on him.

The clamor died away, away as if it were on the far side of a hundred hills. He almost regretted that he had come back. Something besides love of his city and the desire to save

it in its hour of trouble had brought him back to Curryville. Now this something had deliberately struck at him.

Gradually he realized that somebody was speaking to him. There was a far-away familiar look about the figure. It was talking to him. At last his eyes came to a focus on it and he saw that it was Doctor Fordyce.

"We're glad to welcome you back," the doctor was saying. "Although you have made me suffer much and brought much sorrow upon me, all is forgiven. Without the comfort of Miss Mendenhall's strength, I don't know how I could have stood it. She has been such a help—"

This was salt to the wound.

Doctor Fordyce watched the effect of his words. As he turned his face aside he smiled slightly. He was satisfied.

The people thronged around Clem, asking a hundred questions and satisfied with one answer. Where had he been? What was the matter? How was he feeling and did he know about the fire in the livery barn?

Judge Woodbridge worked his way down the aisle. "Isn't he a sight for sore eyes?" he asked Hulda, standing delightedly near her. "Clem's an awfully nice boy. He's oil to this town—it hasn't run right since he left."

Hulda beamed and in response slipped her hand into her brother's arm.

Judge Woodbridge, after a smile equally divided between Hulda and Clem, edged down to the platform and pounded with his gavel. "I think we have covered the question of voting pretty well," said Judge Woodbridge. "Everybody think it over and to-morrow everybody turn out and do his duty as a citizen."

"That's right," sang out Doctor Fordyce, "everybody turn out and help put Curryville on the map. There's just one way to do that—vote her straight."

A figure came plowing down the aisle and leaped up on the platform. It was Rick Oody. His fingers went into his mouth and brought forth a whistle with more effect than Judge Woodbridge's gavel had ever accomplished.

"It's Clem Pointer!

"Ladies and gen'lemen and everybody," called out Rick, "it ain't all over yet. Mr. Pointer wants to say a few words."

A dozen hands buoyed Clem along to the platform.

Judge Woodbridge was flustered by the excitement of it all, but felt that he must say something by way of introduction. "Ladies and gen'lemen," he said in Rick's manner without knowing it, "the fatted son has returned to the prodigal calf. It will now speak!"

Clem's eye roved the hall a moment, passing by the scholarly blacksmith that had been such an inspiration to Mr. Kiggins, and wavered between Hulda and Miss Mendenhall. "Friends, I am not going into details now of where I have been or anything about it—that'll come out later. There's something else I want to talk about.

"When I came to this town it wasn't much bigger than a pound of soap after a hard day's washing," Clem went on, seemingly at random, "and now look at our new overall factory and

the new acetylene gas plant. We have stood side by side and fought for a better city. A couple of years ago it looked like we might have it when that man wearing a tall hat came here and talked about a railroad. But that died down and we had a pun'kin show to boost things. Then Doctor Fordyce came."

Doctor Fordyce smiled and rocked contentedly back and forth on his heels.

"I remember what a hard struggle we all had boosting for Curryville and how the time the lightning rod agents came and got Uncle Wash Hoosher to sign a contract for sixty dollars, and when it turned out to be six thousand dollars how we all stuck together and—and Uncle Wash's still got his little eighty. I recollect the time the Hinkson got on a rampage and washed the roof off the Kennedy house and how we all turned out and built 'em a new house up the hill in two days—and Judge Woodbridge give 'em the bed out from under him and had to sleep at the New Palace for two nights—now didn't you, Judge?"

Judge Woodbridge suddenly found it necessary to examine the head of the gavel.

"I don't have to look back very far to the time four masked men swooped down on the First National and how we got 'em surrounded in the timber down the river, and that's why Mr. Knabb has to set with one leg stuck out in front of him—you can see him now—and never a word of complaint from him. And the time the ice fell down the brick water-tower and smashed it open like a wet bag, who was it that run out in his bare feet, grabbed Grandma Goodson out of bed and carried her away before the water and ice knocked in the side of the house? Yes, who was it, Jim Ford? I could go right through every one of you and tell something that way. When anything goes wrong with one of us we are all brothers. We have our little differences and squabble a bit now and then, but bigger hearts never beat than we got right here in Curryville.

"Now another danger has come up. The

man with the tall hat has come back and is planning a railroad through Curryville. From the headquarters of the railroad the tip got out and they found about where the road was planned and a company of speculators is trying to get an option on—on the Bellows Bottoms! Once they get an option on it Curryville will have to buy the land back from them to hold out an inducement to the railroad. The name of this company that is trying to get the option is the Southern Development Company. Their personal representative is in this hall tonight." Eyes turned around to Brassy in the back part of the hall as being the only available stranger present. "He don't wear a tall hat but he does have on a long-tailed coat. Probably Doctor Fordyce has heard of the Southern Development Company."

Doctor Fordyce stopped rocking on his heels.

"I am sure I don't know what you mean."

"Perhaps this will refresh your memory," holding up a telegram. "It is dated from Curryville. I will read it:

" 'Hop picking southeast by east Tuesday or Rover dies a dead dog.—Fordyce.' "

"Sammie," asked Clem, turning to the station boy, "do you remember sending this telegram?"

"Yes," answered Sammie, "but it didn't make any sense to me!"

"It was not intended it should. It is in cipher and the word Tuesday means that the election will be held to-morrow. Does that bring back anything to you, Doctor Fordyce?" the accent heavy on *Doctor.*

"Nothing whatever," returned Doctor Fordyce coldly. "Probably the same thing that made you leave town is now causing you to bring this accusation." He tapped his forehead significantly.

"That has nothing to do with it," returned Clem.

"I insist that it has," declared the other aggressively.

"Maybe, maybe," said Clem sweetly, "it was to collect evidence against you. Has any one ever seen any of your wonderful medicine?

It's true you have a medical license, but where have you practised in the last few years? You no more intended to put up a medicine factory on the Bellows Bottoms than you expected me to come back to-night." There was a flash and a defiance about Clem that no one had ever seen before. "I think the hop picking Tuesday will be a bit harder than you calculated."

"You have no evidence at all except a telegram in a cipher which has to do with ordering supplies for the factory."

"Do you usually order supplies in cipher?"

"This is the first order and it saves words. Besides, that is only a circumstance—didn't the mob come just because one of the town boys found my watch-charm near where you left your hat and coat when you played that deceitful game? Hadn't I been showing it to you and hadn't you dropped it into your pocket by mistake and forgot all about it? This is much less evidence and you wish to make charges against me on such a flimsy pretext. I can not but believe that you have suffered some cerebral accident." Doctor Fordyce

touched his head again to show just what he meant.

Clem wavered a moment then collected himself. "Why do you have to telegraph to the Southern Development Company to order supplies?" he shot at the confident doctor.

Doctor Fordyce wavered. "Because—I am —because they are my age—because, don't you see, I could not swing this whole deal myself and had to get somebody to put in money with me."

"So you are connected with the Southern Development Company?"

"Yes."

"Are you their agent?"

Doctor Fordyce cast around for the right answer. "Not that, but there is an understanding."

"Were you ever in Joplin?" asked Clem quickly.

"Yes."

"Were you the agent of this company there last year?"

"I can't see that that has anything to do with

the voting to-morrow. It seems to me we are wasting good time."

"You are the man who put through that crooked mining deal there—only Fordyce wasn't your name then. And what about the timber deal in Texas County, this state? It might be interesting to you to know that in a few days you will have to answer these things for the benefit of the prosecuting attorney. There is a gentleman here to-night that I want to say a few words. He has met Mr. Fordyce before." Clem drew out the Mister with evident relish. "He is a very dear friend of mine —Mr. Hagan."

Rick Oody opened up a way, and from the rear of the hall came the rotund and smiling Brassy. His clothes were neater and there was about him a more substantial look.

At sight of the new speaker Miss Mary Mendenhall caught her breath and edged over toward Hulda, her face burning.

Brassy stumbled toward the table and anchored. Naturally at home with words and master of them before a small circus crowd,

his tongue now refused its mission. He stared over the heads of the audience, but sight of the hard-working mechanic over the rear door brought no inspiration to him. Brassy held on to the table as if all was lost save honor.

"This gentleman," said Brassy, pointing to Doctor Fordyce, "if I may use the term, and I have met before, I am sorry to say. I'd be a lot better off to-day if I'd never formed his acquaintance. So would my town. When he got through with us there wasn't much left except our stand pipe and only its size made it safe."

Doctor Fordyce popped up. "Yes, we have met before, and I am surprised that he should wish to recall the event. There is a presence in this hall to-night that keeps me from telling what I know about this man. If I should tell some of the things that I know about him, just and indignant citizens would never let him spend the night inside the city limits. As long as I respect womanhood I shall not tell the public what I know about this man."

The audience was under Fordyce's spell, and

Brassy realized what he must overcome. He straightened up at this scent of battle.

"He needn't tell you about me—I'll tell you more than he can. He means that I used to drink and gamble and was a follower of the circus. That's what he means—and I was. But I've reformed. Even at my worst I didn't drag anybody else down, while this man Fordyce has destroyed whole towns just as he is intending to destroy this one. I'll admit that my family is ashamed of me, but they're going to be proud of me yet. Every word that Mr. Pointer has told you to-night about this man is true—and he has barely scratched the surface. In a few days the prosecuting attorney will tell you more about him."

He addressed Fordyce directly. "Since I saw you last I have thrown over followin' the circus and am now making an honest living. Our president, Mr. Sayers—I guess you know who he is—is on your trail, too. The police in Kansas City are acquaintances of yours. You have met them. You made such an impression on them that they

took prints of your fingers to remember you. And here is something interesting." Calmly, deliberately, Brassy's hand went into his pocket, and in the hush that held all over the hall, brought out two photographs. "One is a front view and the other is a side view. You didn't have all that beard then, that's the only difference. They didn't charge you anything for makin' these pictures. The concern that made them does quite a bit of free photographing. You'll see down at the bottom it says, 'Photo by the Department of Police.' I guess we know which shell you're—"

Brassy stopped, speechless. His lips parted, then closed without framing a single word. His eyes were fastened on Miss Mary Mendenhall.

Doctor Fordyce was quick to seize the opportunity. Edging over he stood protectingly by Mary's side. "Well, why don't you go on?" he demanded. "Why do you keep staring at Miss Mendenhall so?"

"Miss Mendenhall?" gasped Brassy.

"Yes, Miss Mendenhall. I resent it. I do

not propose to have a drunken outcast come in here and stare at a young lady in that way."

The audience stood in hushed silence, trying to keep up with the changing scene. Brassy's face worked convulsively for a moment, then he backed toward a chair and covered his eyes.

Fordyce climbed on a bench the better to exercise his power. "Friends," dropping his tone to one of entreaty, "that is an example of the men who are opposing me. Cowards, every one. They are attacking me when I am trying to do something to build up Curryville. Truly ingratitude is sharper than a serpent's tooth. My good people, stop and think for just one moment what you are doing. Here is something to remember. Crowds act hastily and do things that they bitterly regret afterward. You will remember you thought you had enough evidence to convict me that night when —I hate to speak it—when the mob came. A pair of twisted and bent spectacles, belonging to Mr. Pointer, were found in my room at the hotel by a boy. When I told you that Clem

had forgotten them the day he came to my room and I gave him the monkey you did not believe me. A watch-charm belonging to me was found by the river where the supposed crime had been committed. When I told you that I had given it to him and that he had dropped it you refused to believe me. Both statements have since turned out to be true. To-morrow you people who wish to act hastily to-night will be ashamed of yourselves. Now, dear friends, is it fair to take this unknown man's word against mine?"

Not a word was spoken by any one in the audience, but still it could be seen that sympathy was running toward Doctor Fordyce.

"This man comes in here, no one knowing who he is, and attacks me in public. The word of a tramp is taken before mine. I have tried to build up this town and am just on the eve of establishing a new era here, when you allow this outsider to come in and smirch my character. Not content with that he must stare at and discomfit one of our young ladies. What

shall we do with the scoundrel? Shall we throw him out?" Doctor Fordyce held up his hand in an appeal.

There was a shuffling of feet and uneasiness, as if a giant man was making up his mind. Plainly sympathy was swinging to Doctor Fordyce and he knew it. "Sure, throw him out," called out a voice, and the shuffling of feet grew heavier.

"That's right," backed up another voice. "Throw him out."

Somebody stepped in the aisle and a seat was dragged aside as if to make room.

Before any one realized it Mary Mendenhall was on her feet and standing at the edge of the platform. "Friends, I wish to say something," she began, and all eyes swung to her. Her voice was not loud but there was a suppression in her manner that drew instant attention. "I think I know why the speaker before Doctor Fordyce could not go on. I think I know why I was stared at so by this same person, and I think in me rests the solution of the whole affair."

She paused and the audience stared eagerly and listened breathlessly.

"It is because this man is my father."

No one moved; there was not even the shuffling of feet. But the full significance had not yet burst on them.

"He is my father. He had no idea I was here, and that is the reason he was so surprised to see me. Over some hot words I left home. I have cried many a night since on account of my foolish stubbornness. I have been using only my first and middle names here and in writing my books. I believe every word that my father has said about his reforming and I want to stand up here before you all and say that I am sorry I left home and that if my father will take me back I'll go with a happy heart."

Brassy's eyes were fastened on her, his soul drinking in the words. When she turned toward him he rushed up and clasped her in his arms.

"I don't know whether to say something or not about Doctor Fordyce," she faltered, tuck-

ing back a strand of hair. She was feminine even in her moment of suspense. "I hate to attack a person, but I feel that you should know something about this Doctor Fordyce. He has known all along who I am and has threatened to tell—to tell what my father has just told you about himself. He has used this as a club over my head and I foolishly have said nothing. Now that I have my father back I don't care what happens."

Again her face went on his shoulder and Brassy's thick hand patted her tenderly.

There was no holding the crowd back as they came surging around father and daughter to offer congratulations, while Doctor Fordyce stood alone in the corner, moody and sullen.

"So you used to travel with a circus, did you?" asked Mrs. Kiggins. "I want you to come over and visit us. I know you got a lot of good stories. I love to meet circus people."

Clem wormed his way through the maze of arms extended to shake hands with him and reached Mary's side. She faced him and their eyes met, but she would not be the first to give

in. She would be feminine, so stared coldly for a moment, then lowered her eyes.

The meeting turned into a reception, all struggling for a word with Clem. He ought to have been perfectly happy, but he was not. Instead he was miserable. It was the first time in all his life he had been miserable in a way that he couldn't put his hand on the pain.

Mrs. Kiggins elbowed up. "Don't things come out curious?" she panted, reaching for Clem's hand. "Just night before last I had the strangest dream. I seemed to be settin' in a great jumble of something—might 'a' been people—and all of a sudden a cloud opened—it might 'a' been a door—and there was you, Mr. Pointer, standing before me smilin'. I could see you plain as life. I didn't say anything about it to anybody because I know how it makes them feel, but I could 'a' put my hand on you. You remember I prophesied the death of the little Kimmons girl that was killed in the railroad switch. People who have such gifts should appreciate 'em, shouldn't they? You're looking well, Mr. Pointer."

Judge Woodbridge and Mr. Ford, who had been talking in the corner, came bustling up and seized Clem, one around the shoulders and the other about the ankles.

"You've saved Curryville," announced the judge, "and you're the biggest hero this city ever saw, and we're going to ride you down the street on our shoulders."

Up went Clem, squirming and blushing. A shout roused the rafters and every eye was turned on him. "Quit, boys, I'm no hero. I've got enough to be ashamed of, so let me go; and besides, anybody else would have done just what I have." His tone was firm. "Put me down, boys."

At last they hesitated and let him to his feet.

"But we want to do something for you," insisted Judge Woodbridge. "And besides, we didn't do anything for you when you saved Miss Mendenhall."

Mary dropped her eyes at remembrance that she, too, had not shown herself grateful.

"Well, I tell you," said Clem, resting his hand tenderly on the judge's wide shoulders, "I'm not deserving, but if you want to give me a uniform for the fire department I'd be mighty glad to have it."

The judge reached up and patted the hand with his own thick one. "Bless his heart, we'll get him half a dozen suits and a fire-engine. A town with two railroads needs a fire-engine, doesn't it, boys?"

The shout of approval left no doubt.

At last the reception broke up, and out on the curb Clem waited for Hulda. But when she came she was not alone. At her side was a stout protecting figure—Judge Woodbridge. Hulda was looking up into the judge's face while he kept a careful hand under her elbow.

"Gee, how times change!" mumbled Clem.

He fell into step with them.

"Yes," said Hulda, answering his questioning look, "you have surprised us, and I guess we have you."

"Yes, indeed, Hulda," said Judge Woodbridge, although the remark in no way fitted in. But perhaps it was as good as any.

There was a happier look on Hulda's face than Clem had seen there in years. Hulda patted the judge's arm in the easy familiar way women have always used to express their happiness. Clem could not help seeing that with all her splendid qualities, and her spotless home keeping that there was something vital lacking in her life. She was now patting it on the arm, and at the sight Clem rejoiced until he saw Brassy and Mary standing at the corner. His home-coming was bitter after all.

Clem was on the point of turning down a side street, that Hulda and the judge might be undisturbed in their happiness, when Brassy reached out and fastened on his coat.

"Say, Mr. Pointer," called out Brassy, "I've got somethin' to ask you—some sweetly flowin' syllables to pour into your ear. Do you think that a man used to luxury the way I am, and sleepin' in the best hotels and on beds of

downy whiteness would be runnin' any great risk to put up in the New Palace?"

"If they hear you speakin' that way about our best-known hotel you'd be about as popular as Doctor Fordyce," answered Clem, although there was no merriment in his soul. "But don't bother about the hotel, you come right out to our house for the night."

Brassy clasped his hand and turned to Mary. "Mary, I want to introduce to you the finest man ever made on this little footstool. When they made him they broke the mold so that there's not another one like him in the world. Mary, my daughter, this is Mr. Pointer."

Mary acknowledged the introduction gravely, suppressing her desire to throw aside all reserve.

"This is a pleasure, Miss Hagan," said Clem, then added, "on my part."

They stood awkwardly a moment, while Brassy stepped over to speak to Hulda and the judge.

Just the sight of Clem brought up Mary's

pulse. A few hours before she had thought that he had passed out of her life forever. Now the familiar square face with its myriads of lines running into the corners of his eyes brought a new feeling over her. She thought of the many things the people of Curryville had said about him after his disappearance. He had stolen into their hearts more than they had realized. Once Mrs. Kiggins, when she wasn't telling about her remarkable psychic powers, had said that he could be of more comfort than anybody in the world when a person had the toothache. And one time Marshal Jupes had said that there was some comfort even in Clem's beating a person at checkers—he never crowed about it afterward. Slowly all this dawned on her, and though her heart tingled at Clem's presence she still hesitated—a feminine something still held her back. As she looked at him she could not help remembering how he had carried her out of the flaming house in his arms, saving her life, and how she had never thanked him. She wished to tell him this, but still something kept her quiet.

Clem looked at her soberly a moment. "Have they had any good fires since I been away?"

Mary laughed and the feminine something was wiped away.

"No, we haven't had *anything* good since you went away."

They started down the street together.

"I ran away to enjoy myself," said Clem, "and nearly every hour of it has been misery. I am so glad to get back that I don't know what to do. It sounds good even to hear Mrs. Kiggins tellin' about her psychic vision. You couldn't run me out of Curryville now with a prod. But an hour ago I didn't think that way. An hour ago I was sorry that I had come back. Can you guess why?"

Mary knew that he meant the way she had turned aside at the hall. "Yes," she whispered, "I think I can. I don't know how it is that people have that stubborn thing in them that makes them fight back when they know that they are wrong. Tell me about everything."

"Well, I left, and the rest of the time I have been trying to get back. But that ain't what I want to talk about. Did you really miss me, Mary?"

Mary reached over for answer and did what women have done for so many ages: she patted him on the arm. And he understood, as men have for so many ages.

Before they knew it they were at her house and had turned in and seated themselves on the porch. They sat in silence for a few minutes, then Clem leaned toward her, and as the light from the window cut across his face Mary could read a new expression in the lines. Suddenly Clem spoke, so suddenly as to startle her.

"I am a fool. That's what I am—a plain unvarnished fool. Nobody but a fool like me would have run away from Curryville trying to find happiness. I learned a lot of things—I found out that a fellow can't go out and hunt for happiness. When he swabs out his gun and goes out he won't ever get a shot at it; but if he will hang his gun over the door and be patient

happiness will come and settle down on his gate-post.

"I was a fool for running away, and I suppose I will be a bigger one in another minute. I am going to tell you something that will surprise you. This is it: I love you!"

Mary looked properly surprised.

"From the day I showed you through the fire house I have loved you." At mention of the fire house Clem straightened up with pride. "But you seemed so far away that I did not dare hope for anything better than just a smile now and then. I ain't much on education—I ain't goin' to say that I never had a chance, because that's no excuse for a man to make—but I am studying and trying to be somebody. It's mighty hard trying to be somebody alone. If I just had some one to help me—if I just had you to help me I could be another man—sometime. Now I am going to say something else that may make me a bigger fool than ever. It is this: Mary, I love you, and I want you to marry me!"

Mary's mind went tumbling off into space. She wanted to give herself to him at once; to say, "I am here—take me. I am yours." But instead, out crept a hand that glided into his. That was her answer. That was all that was needed. Not a word was spoken.

Just then two figures appeared on the lawn. One was stout and swung along with joyful abandon; the other was slim and came noiselessly—as befits detectives. The stout one was Brassy.

As the steps of Brassy and Rencie crunched on the lawn there was a stir on the porch, and when the two came up Clem's flushed face was in shadow, while Mary sat at the other end of the bench demurely fingering the end of a ribbon. But her father's eye had not been deceived.

"Jumping crickets, but I never saw two people get acquainted the way you two have," breezed Brassy. "I won't bother you, don't worry.

"Mary, my girl, do you know I am real dippy about Curryville? One thing, it's got

Clem, and another thing it won't have Fordyce much longer. Don't you think your mother would like to live here—in a little vine-covered cottage with a cat sleepin' in the sun on the front porch?"

"She would love it!" exclaimed Mary, and the three drew together to make plans. But Brassy had feeling enough not to stay long.

In a few minutes after Brassy left Clem got ready to start home. That is, it seemed like a few minutes. Before he got up to his own house he realized how late it was and he approached in fear and trembling, for he knew Hulda of old.

At the door Clem paused in surprise, for Judge Woodbridge was just leaving.

Hulda was smiles all over.

"Come over and set down," said she after the door had closed on the judge, "and let's have a good talk. I feel barrels of it coming."

She drew Clem's rocker up to his side of the table and freshened the cushion with a shake. Then she leaned back in her own chair and folded her hands across her waist.

Clem placed the lamp squarely over the yellow crack and sank back in peace and contentment. "By jooks!—there I'm saying it, too—but anyway I'm mighty glad to get home. You couldn't get me away again if you tied my feet."

Hulda's hand crept up to the yellow crack, and Clem's slipped across to meet it.

"I'm not a fit sister for you to come back to, but I'm going to be. And I'm not going to be so picayunish and faultfinding any more and I'm not going to wait till you're dead to let you know that I love you, either. This thing of waiting till the horse is stolen to—"

A step sounded on the porch and knuckles rattled at the door.

"You answer it, Hulda," said Clem, having an idea who was coming.

Hulda gave her skirt a straightening shake and opened the door.

It was Rick Oody with one shoulder sagging down. "It's a present for you, Miss Pointer," he said, and backed off the porch.

"Land sakes alive, what can it be? And

who'd be givin' me a present this time of night?"

Eagerly she pulled off the wrapper revealing a cannel-coal smoothing iron.

"Clem Pointer, ain't that just like you!" she exclaimed, turning her head away and raising the hem of her dress to her eyes. "You just shut your eyes!"

Clem closed his eyes, Hulda tiptoed around the table and bent over him.

"Now," she said, "you take this in the kitchen so I won't look at it any more till morning. If I was any happier I'd—" but she could say no more.

Clem rose and started for the kitchen. At the door he stumbled and gasped in astonishment. With a shrill cry of delight Garibaldi had leaped on his shoulder.

THE END

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